















ALL FOR THE BEST.

VOL. II.



LONDON

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NEW-STREET SQUARE

# ALL FOR THE BEST:

A Story of Quiet Life.

“ So, He bringeth them to the haven where they would be.”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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# ALL FOR THE BEST.

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## CHAPTER I.

SCARBRO', *August 24th.* — The poet was not so very far wrong, after all, when he affirmed that —

“ August is a pleasant month,  
The best of all the year.”

I don't feel in the least inclined to rail at this hotel life now ; and as for the crush and jam and foolery of the Spa and promenade concerts, and that sort of thing, — why I never go near them, so I don't feel called upon to complain.

Mrs. Sharrup and her two daughters are gone, and Mr. Golden Brown looks sadder and more pensive than ever. I found his copy of Shelley

this morning, with the leaf turned down at the Hymn to Night, and huge black dashes and underlinings, to indicate, I suppose, the intensity of his feelings. Poor young gentleman! Well, if I don't mistake, I shall see him again before long, meandering through the Marbrook streets; meandering not alone.

It is astonishing the gossiping sort of feeling one gets, through living in a house like this. If anybody had told me two months ago, that I should have cared to manifest the slightest interest in Miss Phoebe Sharrup's matrimonial speculations, or indeed those of anybody else, I should have said the thing was simply impossible. I used to have such a profound contempt for all that sort of thing. And yet here have I filled page after page of my journal with these same speculations, and enjoyed doing it too. Isabella Ponde and her mother are going home next week, unless the young lady gets her own way and stays another month. The collegians too have drifted off to the South cliff, complaining that the North shore was too dull for them. The Misses Scramble are off to the Continent. New people come

one by one, but we do not draw to them, nor they to us. Papa and Mr. Lowe, Mrs. Tresilis and I, have it all to ourselves, and the others come and go as they like.

We have been here more than a month, and shall stop ten days longer. When I look back upon it, what a long time it seems! Weeks and weeks have gone since papa and I took our first walk on the sands that Wednesday morning, and I listened for the first time to the ocean sound which is so familiar to me now. And how far back, how very far back, that evening seems when Maud and I sat talking under the beech tree while Stephen Roden gathered the bright-veined leaves and wound them in her hair. Just before we came here it was, and yet it looks so long ago. I felt discontented that evening, I remember. I don't feel so now. I have a sort of quiet resting, and sense of coming peace. I don't know why it should be so, for nothing particular has happened; perhaps it is that I am learning to think less of myself, and to feel more interest in others. I rather think, though, I got a sort of insight into what it was that had made

me discontented before, while Mr. Lowe was reading to papa the other day that chapter in an old review, where it says, "The mind listens too much to itself." Let me note that down among my choice thoughts, let me take it home to my heart and ponder upon it.

How different everything seems since Mr. Lowe came! Not that he takes any notice of me, for we rarely speak to each other, but there is a something about him which binds us all together, and makes us feel at peace. I think he is a very kind man, although he appears so grave and stern sometimes. I judge this from little things I have seen in him. We were walking down Newboro' the other day, and there was a little girl trying in vain to reach the knocker of a door. Scores of people passed and repassed, but no one offered to help her. One great puppyish, moustached fellow drawled out, "I'll help you for a kiss, pretty one;" another said, "Try again, little miss;" others laughed and went on. Mr. Lowe crossed over the road through the wet and dirt to reach the knocker for her, and she gave him such a bright smile. That same morning he stopped ever so

long, when we got out on the Falsgrave road, to help a poor old man who was trying to get a sack of potatoes into his donkey-cart. I have found out, too, that every day when he passes poor old Mrs. Scott's cottage he unfastens her shutters for her, to save her the trouble of hobbling out and doing it herself, as she is so rheumatic. There are not many people who would think of doing such a kindness as that.

I have a pleasant sort of feeling come over me as I sit here by my little room window, where I have sat before so restless and discontented. Life is better worth having, after all, than I thought it was. There is Isabella Ponde's laugh again. How that girl vexes me sometimes, even when I am in the best of tempers! That night when we three came in from our long silent walk on the cliff, she was singing that common popular tune that one hears from all the barrel-organs and German bands from morning to night: she changed the last line, and sung as we entered the room, —

“Oh, Philip, we have missed you.”

I could have swept her off the stool, or thrown a



pail of cold water over her. Mr. Lowe took no notice, but walked quietly to his seat by the fireplace. I learn more and more to think that silence and retirement are the most admirable features of a woman's character. I believe he thinks so too.

But what was I intending to write about when I came up here? Not all this certainly, about Isabella Ponde and her doings. It was about our walk on the sands yesterday morning.

I had long intended to go and gather sea-weed on the rocks at low water, but the tide never served until yesterday, when papa and I, and Mr. Lowe and Mrs. Tresilis, set off. We went to that long range of low, brown, rugged rocks that stretches away to Scalby on the north shore. We did not keep long together, though. It gave papa a pain in his shoulder to stoop down, and Mrs. Tresilis got tired of the monotony of the thing ; so they two went off to finish their walk on the sands, while Mr. Lowe and I stayed.

It was a very quiet sea. The tide was going out, leaving a wider and wider extent of rough, brown, slippery, seaweed-covered rocks, with clear

crystal-like pools among them, wreathed round and round with long plumes of grassy foliage; white feathery tufts, pinky corallines and delicate crimson sprays, long waving palm-like green leaves, plaited in many folds and gemmed over with shining air-bubbles—all drifting and floating hither and thither with the sleepy motion of the tide. Truly it seemed to me, if any one was weary and restless, he would but need to look down into one of those deep, clear rock pools and be quiet again. At least so I thought, but then, somehow or other, I felt very happy yesterday morning. If I had been in a fretting mood, the case might have been different. We followed the tide as it went down lower and lower, until at last the people walking to and fro on the sands seemed like dolls, and the bright red and green-coloured bathing machines like children's toy-houses ranged along the shore. And everything around was so still; no sound but the rolling and crooning of the waves, or the plashing of the tide as it eddied and swirled round the ragged rocks. Sometimes Mr. Lowe would come and help me to get a piece of sea-weed that grew down below

my reach on the pebbly floor; and now and then, when he had found a choice specimen, he would lay it in my basket, saying he had more like it at home. But he never offered to talk to me much; and when I looked up and got a stray glance of his face, it had a quiet but strange, far-off sort of expression, as though he had nestled down in some pleasant brood of thoughts with which I had no concern. Such an expression as I have seen sometimes on Stephen Roden's face when he watched Maud's dainty little figure flitting round our room at home; a look that seemed to have gone far away into the future after possible visions of happiness. And the thought just came over me, that perhaps, in some distant home that I knew nothing about, there might be another little Maud waiting for Mr. Lowe, and thinking of him.

At last I grew tired of this long silence, and began to speak about Mrs. Tresilis, and how I had learned to love her since she came. When I got to that, a troubled look came over his face, and he said quickly, "You don't mean that you

*love* her, Miss Harcourt; you only *admire* her. We never love those whom we cannot esteem."

I thought in that case no one would take the trouble to love me, but I kept my thoughts to myself, and merely said that where we admire and pity, love is not far distant. He did not answer me for a good while, and I thought we were going to relapse into our pristine silence as he stood there, guiding a long spray of seaweed with his walking stick through one of the pools, and watching the infinite gracefulness of its thousand fibres as the current waved them to and fro. By and by, he said abruptly —

"Then you know Mrs. Tresilis?"

"Yes, there is no one else worth knowing here."

I was sorry as soon as the words were out, for there was a good deal of unintentional rudeness in them. But I can't bear making apologies, so I let them pass. Mr. Lowe did so too.

"Then you know something, I suppose, of her faith, or rather no-faith, since you speak of pitying her?"

“ I know this much of it,” I said, “ that it is one which brings her no comfort.”

“ You hold the Christian faith, do you not ? ” he asked, still pondering on the miniature forest of tangled greenerie which he was piloting across the pool.

Of course I replied, proudly and decidedly, that I did. And there arose before me a whole army of collects that I had listened to, Sunday after Sunday throughout the year in our church at Braeton ; with the every day Creed, and the Creed proper for holydays, said by me with the prescribed genuflexions ; also the rubrics and formulas of the Church ; all of which had been duly and truly observed by me since I had attained to years of discretion. Yes, I hold the Christian faith, not a question of it, and I told him so, bravely and straightforwardly.

“ Then doubtless you have often, in the hours you spend together, tried to lead her to a surer rest than she has hitherto found. You have used the influence which as a Christian you possess, in comforting that poor tossed heart of hers, and

done the best you could to guide her to ‘the haven where she would be.’”

Alas! I had never done anything of the sort. I had amused myself by studying her strange, fitful, poetical mind. I had watched for the mere love of beauty, the changing expressions of her mobile countenance, and I had listened to her musical voice as it poured forth unconsciously so much of the unrest and grief which lay beneath it. Farther than this I had never gone. Oh, how selfish I seemed to myself just then; how utterly cold, with all my fancied taste and intellect and talent! But I was too proud to acknowledge this, so I merely said that I supposed Mrs. Tresilis had studied the subject for herself, and needed no interference of mine.

“Did it ever occur to you,” said he, “that it might be other than mere chance which brought you and her together, and gave you the opportunity, if not the inclination, to do her good? Standing her equal in intelligence and taste, you have an influence over her which none of the other people possess, and do you think that it is of no consequence how you use that influence?”

Strange conversation this to accompany our marine researches. Mine, so far as any practical result was concerned, were over now, and I stood looking out upon the wide, flat sweep of blue sea, and the bold curves of the sunlit cliffs, with no other thought than how strange it was that Mr. Lowe should be talking to me thus. I who, whatever my inner faults may be, and there are plenty of them sure enough, had held my outer life hitherto so very high and pure, to be thus pulled down from my excellency, and taught how selfish and weak was the foundation on which my castle of fancied superiority had been built! I had gloried before to see how Mr. Lowe could pull the disguise from other people's hearts; now it was my turn to come under the same operation — to feel that same strong hand tearing down my entrenchments of pride and self-complacency. Yet I was not vexed, however humbled I might be, to find myself thus criticised and taken to pieces, since it was done by one whom at least I respected. Mr. Lowe was the first person who had ever talked to me in this way. All other men I had met, either professed to have a

profound regard for my superior intellect, and talked to me as if I had been a walking encyclopedia of general literature ; or else, thinking of me merely as one of those idle butterflies who dance and flutter in the gas-light of drawing-rooms and evening parties, had disgusted me with the shallow commonplaces which formed their conversational stock-in-trade. Now, however, there was a feeling of freshness and healthiness in the thought that this man dared to speak the truth to me, and, putting off all shams and falsenesses, tell me plainly out what a failure my life had been.

“I have watched you sometimes,” he said, “since you came here, and I have thought that you possessed great powers either for good or evil. It is your way to lead others, rather than be led yourself ; only it is a serious question to be asked, whether you lead them in the right way.”

I replied carelessly, for I did not want him to see how near he came to the truth, that I was not aware I had exerted any special influence ; as I had kept as much apart from the rest as possible, and amused myself with my own pursuits.



“Exactly so ; I found that out for myself from the first day I came.”

Had he then been watching me so closely ? While I thought him so reserved, so silent and self-contained, had he been taking the trouble to study me thus carefully ? There was something pleasant in the thought. After all, we like to be taken notice of, even though our faults may come to light in the process. He continued —

“But in that, too, you were exerting an influence, stronger perhaps than you thought for. Don’t you think *example* is the most powerful influence we possess, since we are perpetually exercising it ?”

“It may be so,” I said, “but I have never thought about it, and therefore, like Simmias in the Platonic Dialogues, I must assent to what you say, as I have no opinion of my own on the subject.”

“Well then, *à propos* of this silent influence of example, let me tell you the effect it has produced on that most interesting circle which assembles daily round our dining table. The young collegians vote you a ‘stuck-up creature ;’ Mrs.

Sharrup thought you ‘gave yourself airs;’ the intellectualist called you a ‘blue;’ and Mr. Golden Brown affirms that you ‘irritate his nerves by your strong-mindedness.’ Now I see farther into you than they do, and therefore I don’t think any of these things of you. But I hold that an intelligent Christian lady ought to have that about her which would disarm such criticisms as these, by proving their falsehood.”

“Well,” I said, hardly knowing whether to laugh or cry, and only saved from alighting on the latter horn of the dilemma by watching the proceedings of a hermit crab which was about to take lodgings in a vacant periwinkle shell, “I do believe I am a sort of black sheep among them; somehow we don’t amalgamate satisfactorily: but what must I do, we do not stand on the same level?”

“Raise them to yours, then.”

“How?”

“By showing, first of all, that you do not despise them. Nothing so utterly destroys the power which intellectual people have over others, as that sense of superiority which is apt to creep

upon them, and manifest itself in their ways; and that feeling of stately isolation which it is only natural they should cultivate, when plunged into the midst of a set of people with whom they have nothing in common."

"I always thought," I said, "that it was very grand and worthy to shut oneself up from inferior people, and go about as the water spider does, through the muddiest streams, cased in a shield of pure, transparent air."

"If you choose to imitate the spider, well and good; but I should prefer to take my exemplars from actual human life, and follow the steps of those who have gone through the world, making men wiser and better, not by shutting themselves up in their own light, but by letting that light shine out, cheery and genial."

"The world has no need of me or my shining. I much fear the only lustre I shall ever give will be like the blue lights a ship hangs out when danger is near."

"Well, and if these same blue lights bring help, and so the ship is saved with all her freight of life and purpose, they have not been hung

there for nothing. Miss Harcourt, what you want is *something to do*, some real, worthy purpose in life. You have more energy than as yet you have found work for; you want — stay, you are standing on slippery ground there, wait until I come and help you away.”

For I had, in my purposeless way, wandered on to a wet sloping rock, where a little gust of wind might have made me lose my footing, and sent me down into the pool beneath. Mr. Lowe took hold of my hand and guided me to a surer place. Just, it seemed to me, as he was doing, in another and higher sense, for my moral footing. I could not but think, when I had got safely landed on trusty ground, how pleasant it would be to have some one always near to help me down from those mental slippery places of which I had found so many lately. We began to retrace our steps, for the day was passing.

“You want a definite aim in life. I heard you and Mrs. Tresilis talking the other day about ‘Aurora Leigh:’ do you remember those brave, bright words of hers?—

“ ‘ Get leave to work  
In this world. ’Tis the best you get at all ;  
For God, in cursing, gives us better gifts  
Than men in benediction.’

In action only is thorough rest and contentment.”

“What must I do then?”

“That is for yourself alone to decide. It is a favourite thought of mine, that to each of us a separate work is given, and that to none but ourselves is that work revealed. What we need is light to read our own powers, and strength to work the wisdom which God gives us into a daily life of worthy deeds. It is no common task that is given to you. Oh, Miss Harcourt, you do not know sometimes how I have longed ——”

Here I espied a broad, bright, floating, palm like leaf—the one I had been seeking for so long — starred with its myriad air-drop jewels, in the rock pool just beneath me. Leaving Mr. Lowe’s side, I went after the emerald treasure and brought it back in triumph, the best and latest-won trophy of my morning’s toil. He did not finish the sentence, and when I came again to him his face had the old far-away look, only

with a little touch of sadness and disappointment. And still as I watched it, it settled down into its habitual expression of calm, stately self-control, the lips fixed in their rigid curves, and the lines of decision, that had relaxed for a while, clearly marked again.

“You were going to say something,” I said.

“Nothing, nothing,” he replied, and then was silent.

I looked at my bright, fresh, transparent frond, with its wavy outline and brilliant tints; and could have thrown it back again into the crystal bed from which I had torn it, so that I might only have heard the rest of that sentence, and joined the links of thought that had been so rudely snapped. But he did not return to the subject.

We picked our way back again over the rocks, he all the while carefully watching my steps and guiding me over the rough places. When we reached the sands he began to talk to me about commonplace things,—the people who were sauntering about, the motley dresses, the variety of countenances, and so on,—in that slightly but

perceptibly altered tone which tells so surely that the words are but floating on the surface. And so, with long gaps and breaks of silence, mingled for me with a vague sense of something missed, we reached the house. He went to inquire for his letters, and I to my room to sort and arrange my treasures.

Thinking it all over again this morning, and noting as carefully as I can that conversation of ours, there comes over me a pleasant sense of being looked after, of having some one at least who cares sufficient for me to tell me of my faults and set before me a higher style of living. I am not the same Mabel Harcourt that I was before that long ramble on the rocks. There seems a new future before me, a path very different to that I have so long trodden; the dawning of an infinite peace and rest that I might have in a life whose aim should be for others, and not all for myself. What shall I say as these thoughts come thronging over me? Will they pass as others have, and leave me still the same? Or is it in this way, hardly understood as yet, that He, the Almighty, the All-merciful

One, is bringing me to the haven where I would be ?

Only I would like to have heard that one sentence. Ah ! my bright, beautiful, floating emerald leaf, you may have been purchased very dearly after all. I could have it in my heart to cast you away even now, to take you and lay you gently down in that same rock pool — I should know it again, I am sure I should — where I first saw you waving so greenly as he said, “ You do not know how I have longed sometimes to tell —— ” and then it was over.

But no, I will keep you after all. I will lay you here in my book, fresh and transparent as you are, every letter shining through that filmy green of yours ; and we will talk together often and often, in days to come, of that pleasant morning — the gentle sea music, the plash of the waves round your rocky resting-place, and of the sound of a voice that has taught me so much that I never thought to know.

Mr. Birdon and his wife left this morning. How many aching hearts go to and fro in this world that we know nothing of ! Will she find



any one else to be kind to him as Mr. Lowe has been?

I can't help contrasting those two faces—I mean Mr. Lowe's and Mr. Birdon's. I think any one else would do the same who had ever seen them together. In one it seems as though there was a spirit within, chiselling every line into beauty and regularity, girding the whole together in that framework of steady resolve. I never saw a face, I don't think there ever was one, which so gives you the impression of power, of a will that could conquer anything; and yet of a gentleness and earnestness which you might rest upon and be entirely at peace. Mr. Birdon's is so different. Disorder is written on every line of his countenance, or rather every lineament of it, for properly speaking it has no lines,—they are long since broken and marred. It is a face which makes you feel as if you wanted to strap it up,—morally speaking I mean,—to brace it together with iron girders of self-control. It is so utterly weak, so aimless in its whole expression. The round full eyes that seem as if they could not bend a steady, earnest glance; the forehead flat

and vacant; the lips so loose and purposeless, with no fixed position, no line of regularity about them; the chin retreating into the background as though ashamed of the countenance it belongs to; the whole outlook of the man within so vague and unformed,—all impresses you with pity for a nature so wasted, for a mind which has so marred the materials given it to work upon.

And to think that these two faces are types of the soul within! To think that the inner spiritual nature of each thus speaks of itself, thus reveals itself unconsciously! To think that the mind of each is writing its story day by day, which all may read!

The two lives, that which looks at things temporal, and that which looks at things eternal, never seemed to me so sharply distinct; one chiselling its material impress on the outward clay, the other making it instinct with nobility and vigour. Verily there are those now who, like Elisha's servant of old, have their eyes "opened" to look out on things of wondrous scope and meaning; to range over that other and spiritual world which lies for most of us so

far away from our daily sympathies and cares, and to bring down into the valley of daily working life the constant presence of that heavenly vision.

I think Mr. Lowe does this.

## CHAPTER II.

*Scarbro', Sept. 1st.* We go back to Braeton to-morrow — still, quiet little Braeton. I say *we*, but I am not sure that the *me* which left it two months ago will ever go back again. Maud would not know me if she were to look into my heart now, instead of my face.

I am really sitting here for the last time, and looking out as I shall never look again upon this restless, twinkling, never silent ocean, — this ocean that I have come to think of as a sort of friend to whom I can tell everything. If I could lay the memory of the past two months upon one of those shining waves that are breaking just now upon the rocks, and let it go drifting calmly out into the great sea, never to return again, would it not be better? But

*would* I let it go if it could be so? I think not.

Mrs. Tresilis leaves too in a few days. I had a long talk with her this afternoon, in which we seemed to come closer together than we have ever done before. She has promised me to think about these things; but it was so little I could tell her about them. Often my own heart takes hold so feebly upon them, that to dare to teach others seems great presumption. But it is what he wished me to do, and there is a sad proud pleasure in the thought of that. When she goes the last link will be gone. Other hopes and interests will spring up in this place; fresh faces will appear where we used to be, and nobody will remember us any more. I wonder if we shall ever meet again — we four that have spent so many pleasant days upon this sea shore. Perhaps not. But I shall always say of these two months, “Lord, keep my memory green.”

Only ten days since I wrote in this book, and yet so much has happened. I don't think I shall ever write in it again. I shall have nothing to say, nothing to look forward to, nothing either

that I need care to remember; only to read over what is here already. I shall often, very often, do that. Again the thought comes over me, would it be better if I had never come here at all — if I had never learned what I have been taught in these eight weeks gone by? Sometimes I almost think it would. I had got accustomed to my life at Braeton, and enjoyed it in a tame sort of fashion, or at least bore it patiently, never much repining for what I knew not then. Now I can never do so any more; all is changed now.

A fly has just stopped at the door. There goes Mr. Shanklin in raven-coloured broadcloth and a white muslin choker. He is off to the promenade concert. Another; the Miss Veres and their mamma in white muslins and opera cloaks; that eternal fist brandishing itself upon their bouquet-holders and the corners of their lace pocket-handkerchiefs. Have people of fashion anything in their system that answers to what ordinary mortals call weariness, that they can go dancing off at seven in an evening to a promenade concert, as fresh as new-made wax flowers, when

the whole of the day has been relentlessly trotted out of existence on the South sands, and walked to death at a horticultural fête? Well, it is no concern of mine. Farewell, worthy friends! Before you come out of your shells to-morrow morning, I shall be far enough away.

If all farewells could be said so easily, how well it would be! If there were no invisible hand at work, weaving links between some of us that we know nothing of until the time comes for breaking them, and then they bind us so; if—but what a simpleton I am to go dreaming on in this way, when it is past seven o'clock and I have all my packing to do, besides a good night's rest to be got some way or other, ready for starting at eight o'clock to-morrow morning! Let me set to work at once; not troubling myself about leaving anything behind me, for that is done already.

No, stay. I will write out the whole story of this day, quietly, carefully—now, with this plaid folded round me, this plaid with the dark brown stripes, the same that he put over me that night we came along the cliffs. Sometimes I lean my cheek down upon it, it is so warm and soft; and

I think about all these things. It seems more natural to write about them here, within hearing of that crooning sea, and with that long line of cliffs cutting their sharp clear curve upon the sky; than to wait until I get back to Braeton, with its woods and copses and smothering green leaves.

This morning I went up to the Castle rock to look for that cave Mrs. Tresilis had told me about on the side of the cliff. I set off very early, before any one was stirring, and wandered about among the ruins, past the valley of the three guns, and under the old keep, and round the overhanging crag which juts out upon the town. How quiet Scarbro' looked!—the grey mist lying in faint half-transparent clouds upon the bridge, gardens, and plantation, and toning down into a softer outline those long, sharp ranges of terraces and crescents and squares which cover the South cliff. I could trace the winding path, clearly marked among the trees, where we three had come that night. The sun shone white and clear round Cornelian Bay, then on the Filey rocks, and away to the fainter headlands of Flamborough. On the



other side, looking towards the north shore, the promontory of Scalby reached out into the sea; and the long bare range of olive-brown rocks where we had gathered sea-weed, dashed back the waves, and broke them up into myriad flakes of white and shining foam. Then wandering round past the Castle keep, I looked down upon the pier, where the sea flung its spray far up over the parapet, and surged restlessly hither and thither among the huge boulder-stones which had fallen from the rocks above. Far below me long lines of vessels lay moored in the harbour, their tall masts shooting up straight and clear upon the brightening sky, and their many-coloured pennons floating idly in and out among the rigging. A few of these were Dutch ships, which reminded me of great black-beetles lying on their backs. Further out, little fishing smacks rocked lazily up and down upon the waves: some were stranded high up on the beach; others were half floating and brown, barelegged fishermen were pushing them out ready for a fresh cruise; others again, with canvas sails aloft, were tacking homeward. How busy the pier and harbour looked, when all

else was so still! And yet, watching it from my rocky eyrie, not a sound reached me; I could only perceive the ceaseless motion. It seems to me so in our own life sometimes; we see the wheels busily, busily working, but hear not the voice which guides them.

Then I set off to the cave Mrs. Tresilis had told me of. She often used to go there to read or think, for no one came to disturb her—I should rather fancy not. I found it after walking round and round, and up and down, for some time. The ground has crumbled away from the edge of the cliff, and a little path leads down to it, hewn out from the great layers of rock. Steering carefully along, for the ledge is very narrow, I found a place as large as a good-sized room, some twenty or thirty feet below the summit of the cliff, formed by great overhanging crags and fragments of rock. What a place for thinking was this! Looking over the narrow ledge by which I came, I could see the waves dashing and foaming some hundreds of feet below me, tossing up clouds of white spray among the loose stones and sea-weedy caverns on the beach below,

and gurgling in and out among the rocks with a hollow sound. How near one seemed to death! Just one little false step, and I should have gone down, down into that restless craving sea, and been carried by it far out and away for ever! I called to mind strange stories I had heard of people who had fallen from this rock and been dashed to pieces on the stones below; and I almost wished Mrs. Tresilis had never told me of the place, for such a strange, eerie, unsafe feeling came over me. Yet it was grand to be there, so free and so alone, with nothing but the great wide blue ocean before me, and those rude dark crags around. No human footstep there, no sound of human voice. And yet I fancied more than once, as I sat on a rough shelf of rock, that I could see a shadow pass along.

I must have been there for near an hour, for the sun rose high and whitened the distant sails, and warmed the long stretch of dark cliffs that wind round the bay; but still it was full early for any one to be about, and still I heard no sound but the far-away dashing of the waves or the whirring of a bird's wing, making perhaps

that shadow that passed and repassed me once or twice. At last I was tired of my loneliness, and got up to go, for I was afraid Papa would wonder what kept me so long away; and he had heard me come out very early, though I had not told him where I was going. I came to the entrance of the cave, just where the rocky ledge winds upward to the top of the cliff: it seemed so much narrower and steeper and more dangerous than when I came down it an hour before, and my eyes too felt dizzy with looking out so long over the sea. A strange feeling of numbness came over me. I dared not go forward a single step; to cry out would have been useless, for no one ever walked on the cliff at that hour, and the soldiers in the castle were too far off to hear me. On one side of me was the sheer, frightful precipice; on the other, the narrow shelf of rock, so steep and craggy. I could never bear to look down a deep descent; even that little cascade rock at Braeton turns my head, and gives me a strange feeling as if I must throw myself headlong from it. Standing on that narrow ledge of rock now, with the ocean boiling fathoms deep below, and

the black crag beetling above my head, a deadly faintness came over me. I felt myself losing all power of speech or motion, and slowly sinking down; a minute more and I should be gone, for there was nothing to cling to.

One wild thought of Braeton and my sister Maud and him rushed over me, and then I remembered nothing more. I was only conscious of a confused hurry and rush of waves, the swirl and toss of angry foam, a strange booming and surging of great deep waters. Then there was a lull. The tide seemed to be going down, and in the midst of a great, utter silence, a voice said to me "Mabel! Mabel!"

After that the tumult grew stronger again: I seemed to be whirling round in a torrent of foam and salt spray, nothing all around and above me but the surging and rushing and eddying and breaking of great waves, with sometimes that same voice sounding through them all—"Mabel! Mabel!" Then for another moment Braeton came up before me, and Maud walking peacefully with Stephen Roden through the sunlit Lingold Wood; but before I could call to them I was far down

again in that restless, whirling torrent, carried round and round, away and away, dashed hither and thither as if by great, strong tides.

It all quieted down at last into a faint, far-off, sealike murmur. When I came to myself again, the sun was shining broadly over the grassy cliff; the old castle stood up, rugged as ever, against the blue sky; the long white terraces of the north shore stretched back and away to the fields; scattered groups of people were going carelessly along, and I was walking with Mr. Lowe up the promenade that led to our house. Everything was just as usual. Was it a dream that I had ever been in that frightful cave at all, and heard the swirl and tossing of the waves upon me, and had that frightful sense of sinking down, down, I knew not whither? And yet I trembled so that I could scarcely walk, and was obliged to hold tight to Mr. Lowe's arm, and he looked anxious and serious, as if something strange had happened.

I stopped long here to think about it all; leaning my head down upon his plaid, and winding its fringes round my fingers. I have lighted the

lamp now and drawn my curtains, for it was getting dark ; but I will finish writing it to-night, and never mind for resting. There will be time enough for sleep by and by, when I get back again to Braeton and have nothing else to do but sleep and dream and be patient.

Nobody took any notice of us as we went along, and when we got to the house and into the dining-room, it was quite empty. He told me I must lie down on the sofa and go to sleep as soon as I could. Then he fetched this plaid and covered me with it, and was going out again ; but I called to him and asked him to tell me before he went away all about it, whether I really had been there, or if it was only a dream.

“ Only a dream ? ” he said to himself in a quiet undertone, as if the words held a great deal more than they told. And then he came again and stood behind me, leaning over the end of the sofa so that I could not see his face, and gave me the whole history of it.

“ I heard you telling Mrs. Tresilis last night that you meant to go on the cliff this morning and find out that cave ; and I felt anxious about

you, for I know how dangerous it is, and how hard to climb up that ledge of rock again after you are dizzy with looking at the sea. So I got up early too, and watched to see if you went in that direction."

"It was very kind of you," I said, "to take so much trouble about me."

"Be still, you must not interrupt me. I saw you go on to the Castle hill, and by and by come down that slanting path which leads to the edge of the cliff. Then I thought it was time for me to come out too; but I did not want you to see me, so I walked up and down the cliff close over the cave. I could see a little bit of your dress, so I was quite sure you were safe, and thought perhaps you had taken a book and were reading. Still I did not like to go away, for I was sure you could not climb that path again alone."

"Mr. Lowe, — how kind of you!"

"Be still, I told you you were not to talk. I had been walking up and down a long time, when at last you came out, and stood on the edge of the rock. I dared not call to you for fear of frightening you. You looked about for sure foot-



ing, but could not find any; then you turned very white and began to sink slowly down. Mabel — Miss Harcourt, if you had fallen forward instead of as you did, backward against the shelving crag, you would not have been here now for me to tell you anything about it. I came down and lifted you up, and brought you safely along the little narrow path, and out again upon the cliff. You seemed to be in a sort of faint, but after you had rested awhile on the grass leaning against me, you got better, and we walked home just as if nothing had been the matter. Now I have told you all.”

“ I must go and see that cave again,” I said.

“ You shall not. I am going this morning before dinner to the Commissioners to have the entrance destroyed and walled up.”

“ You have not told any one, not even Papa ? ”

“ No, he had better not know about it; it might startle him, and make him nervous. It shall not be mentioned to any one.”

I was sure, if he promised, it would not.

I could not see his face all the time he was telling me this, but his voice had a sound in it I

had never heard before; so different from that steady, wrought-iron sort of ring that it often has when I have heard him speak. Then he told me again to go to sleep, and get thoroughly rested. He brought me a cushion from one of the other sofas, wrapped his plaid closer over me, and went away, shutting the door so quietly. I could not help just turning to look once at his face. It was as quiet and still as usual, only relaxing a little as he said "good-bye" to me.

When he was gone, I went off into a confused, half waking, half sleeping dream, where I seemed to be floating in and out upon an ocean swell; then slowly sinking among tangled seaweeds, and bright coloured shells, and plummy tufts of green sea grass, and shining corals; while over all there was a ceaseless murmur of waves, and a voice, sweeter than any music I had ever heard, which said only "Mabel! Mabel!"

When I awoke the words were in my ears still, but not with the same music, for it was only Mrs. Tresilis sitting beside me, and asking if I was ill. I told her, what was indeed true, that I had a headache. The early morning air often gives it

me. She brought me a cup of tea and a biscuit, for it was past dinner time, and then sat in the window reading, whilst I went to sleep again. I suppose I must have been dozing in that way a long time,—a very long time,—for when I roused myself again, the sun was setting behind the wold uplands, and making the old black Castle look warm and purple. But the room was still empty. Isabella Ponde's knitting was lying on the little side table; Mrs. Vere's writing portfolio, with the embossed crest uppermost, reposed in solemn state on the secretary as she left it there last night. The books, too, were packed away, the chairs set up in their places, and the whole room had an air of arrangement very different to the topsy turvy confusion and elegant disorder which reigned there in a general way at this time in the afternoon when we ladies assembled for tea. I asked Mrs. Tresilis why all looked so empty and deserted; and she told me that the company had made up a party to go to Sudbury Park that morning. It had all been arranged at the breakfast table, quite in a hurry. There was going to be a flower show, or something of that

sort, and the day promised to be so fine that it seemed a pity to miss it.

“Why didn’t you go?” I said.

“Oh,” she answered, leaning against my cushion, and playing with one end of the plaid that was still wrapped warmly round me, “I can’t bear these sorts of things. It grieves me so to see those poor flowers trained up for display, and forced to leave their quiet homes to be stared at by a set of unthinking idlers. Then the glare and noise and clap-trap music, and the utter artificialness of the whole thing — no, Mabel, I don’t like flower shows or ‘horticultural fêtes,’ as Mrs. Vere calls them. By the way, Mr. Penarva inquired for you, and said he had thoughts of inviting you to accompany him on horseback, — thought — ar — you had a stylish figure — ar — for that sort of thing — ar —”; and Mrs. Tresilis reproduced the Penarva drawl to a nicety; but I did not feel disposed to laugh at it, or indeed at anything else. All I wanted was to lie quietly there with that plaid folded close round me, and to think of the great danger I had passed.

“When he found you were not to be had, he

transferred his polite invitation to Miss Georgiana Vere, who accepted it in consideration of his name and appearance. He came out for the occasion in a new suit turned up with black velvet, and mauve tie and gloves. There were two carriages full, besides."

"And has Papa gone too?" I said.

"Yes, we persuaded him, for we thought the turn out would do him good, and he had heard of some fine geological specimens in the neighbourhood, which made him more willing to go; only he would have enjoyed it so much more if you could have gone too. I told him I thought you had taken Foster's life to Scalby, for a morning's reading on the rocks. This is Mr. Lowe's plaid, Mabel, you have got to wrap yourself in: what a pity he has forgotten it! he will miss it so this cold evening."

Then he had gone to the flower show with the rest. Every time the hall door opened, I had listened for his step on the stairs, thinking that he would come in to us, and we should have such a cosy evening, all three of us together. But it was no use listening any more now; and somehow

my anticipations of a pleasant time cooled down. He must have gone as soon as I had dropped off into that long sleep, and walked after them quickly to overtake them. I wished he had told me. Yet I could hardly fancy him at a flower show, meandering about among various specimens of the monkey and butterfly tribe, such as one meets with there. Then I began to wonder how he would be dressed; would it be the loose grey overcoat and black tie that I knew so well; or would our staid, quiet, sensible Mr. Lowe come out for the occasion in a fancy suit, and perambulate the tents and grassy slopes in Penarva style? Or, perhaps, again, he would not go to the show at all, but he and Papa would be having a quiet ramble together. Did he know that this was our last day, I wonder? I had not told him of it myself, and Papa was often very absent, so that he might not have mentioned it either. And yet I thought, if he did know, he would have liked to spend it quietly with us both; at least I knew I would have done so, for any of my friends, for whom I cared as much. But I comforted myself with the thought that they would be sure not to

be late, and we should have at least one quiet little hour after tea; and I thought, perhaps, too, — we do catch so at little chances of happiness, when the end is coming very near, — we might get up early the next morning, and have a walk together on the sands, just to take a farewell look at the sea, and watch the tide swaying round about those bare, brown rocks once more.

So I tried hard not to feel sorry about it, and began talking to Mrs. Tresilis, who seemed surprised at my long silence. We had tea brought in, and took it sitting in the bay window, and talking the while, half sadly, half pleasantly, as those do who may perhaps never talk to each other any more. She spoke of trying to live a new life, of seeking such a rest as Mr. Lowe seemed to have found. She said how much some of his words, very few though they were, had sunk into her heart; what new thoughts they had brought; how they had seemed to make the future, with its possibility of rest, so much more precious to her. I listened to her in a sort of half dream, feeling that it was pleasant to hear any one speak about him.

After that we both fell into a thoughtful mood. How beautiful Mrs. Tresilis looked, with the red colour lying upon her cheeks, and the steady lambent light gleaming in her great eyes, as she sat there in the window, gazing out over the cliff with its groups of idle loungers, away to the broad sea and the distant purpling headlands. Perhaps she was thinking even now of that long ago night in London, when the little muse, the child Euterpe, walked for the last time, hand in hand and thought to thought, with him who had awakened her soul; laying perhaps, one more flower of recollection on his shrine, one more last lingering thought upon a departing dream, ere to her there came that other, more glorious awakening into the light of dawning faith.

For her eyes had the look of one who, for a time at least, is at peace, through forgetfulness of the present and memory of the past. And my thoughts—where were they? Not so far off as hers, but dreaming over this strange morning, with the heave and rush of waves; that voice which had spoken through it all, my name, my



sacred home name, "Mabel, Mabel," as I had never heard it said before. But why should I think of what he had said, or how he had said it, when even now he would be forgetting me in the midst of that gay scene; perhaps listening to Isabella Ponde's jokes and repartees, as they drove home in the carriages. And with that there came over me a sharp and bitter feeling, which told me my thoughts had better come quietly homeward. So I brought them back, while hers rested still in the home of her youth.

It is pleasant to be with people who can understand and respect your moods of feeling; who don't bore you to make conversation, as if the sole end of two people being together was that they should issue a certain number of words, and keep up a perpetual fire of meaningless remarks. We were both of us disinclined to talk, so availed ourselves of that rare privilege of friendship — perfect silence; a privilege we are often so slow in granting, even to those we love the best.

The groups of people on the cliff began to disperse. Papa had come home on horseback,

so I knew the rest of the party could not be far off, and I heard him go upstairs into his room. The band of music that comes past every evening had finished its performances, and the musicians had shouldered their respective instruments. The little fishing vessels were tacking across the bay for a fresh night's toil, and all was looking very bright and still, when our party came in sight. I had such a strange feeling of content when I saw Miss Vere's long purple-coloured plume floating at the far end of the terrace, accompanied by Mr. Penarva's fancy costume and elaborate fittings-up. Then the carriages staid at the gate, and I looked out to see our people alight, for I wanted to know who had been Mr. Lowe's companion in gaiety. Mr. Stanley and Miss Vere got out first, then Mr. Evenstill and the aristocratic mamma, she, still true to her principle, carrying a superb velvet reticule, with the clenched fist bristling on the most conspicuous side. After she got out, the carriage drove off. Mr. Lowe was in the other, it appeared. It drew up to the door, and I watched eagerly. Miss Evans, the young lady from Liverpool, and Mrs.

Ponde made their exit first. There was no one left now but Isabella Ponde ; how strange that he should have chosen her for a companion ! With her usual bravery and cool independence, she jumped out first, but that did not surprise me much, for Mr. Lowe is not exactly a lady's man, and fails sometimes in those prompt attentions which Mr. Golden Brown or the Penarva would tender with such captivating solicitude. She cleared the steps at a single bound, then hauled out a parcel, bouquet, and parasol, said something to the driver which I could not hear, bolted up the garden walk, and the carriage drove off after the other one. Stranger still ! No doubt Mr. Lowe had gone on to settle about paying and so forth, for our united business affairs were invariably committed to his trust. Still I thought, if I had been in the lady's place, I should have expected a trifle more attention ; but it was no concern of mine, and the best that I could do was to let it alone.

A few minutes passed, and then we were summoned to a second tea. Mrs. Vere, all majestic condescension, occupied the top of the

table; Miss Georgiana, wearing the sweetest smile I had ever yet seen on her woman's lips, accepted the devotion of Mr. Penarva, and listened with aristocratic suavity to his inane attempts at conversation. Isabella Ponde was sailing away at the rate of ten knots an hour with Mr. Evenstill, and bearing him down under her magnificent breadth of sail, as a full-manned East Indiaman sweeps the pigmy boats after it. The others had disposed themselves according to taste. Papa was going to have tea in his own room. Mrs. Tresilis and I were not much disposed for the ceremony of a second meal so soon after the other one, so we just took a cup of tea and a biscuit, and sat down by ourselves in the window, leaving the rest of the party to discuss the brilliant day, the gay dresses, the fine music, &c. &c., which they did with profound sagacity. I watched and watched for one more to come in and take his place among them, but the circle seemed to be complete, and no one mentioned him.

“Mr. Lowe is not here,” I said at last, in that quiet, unconcerned tone which most people can assume so well when, though no one may know

it, their whole happiness is staked on the answer which may be given. Mrs. Tresilis seemed surprised.

“Mr. Lowe! No, of course not. Did I not tell you that he was gone, set off just before luncheon?”

“Yes, to the flower show, but why has he not returned?”

“To the flower show! No, no; I thought I told you. He was telegraphed for to the North to see his mother, who is ill. He will be travelling far into the night, and that made me so sorry to see his plaid left behind. He forgot it in his hurry, no doubt. He came into the room very quietly, as I was sitting reading; I don’t think he saw me. I thought, perhaps, he had come to say good-bye to you, and when he found you asleep he seemed to hesitate whether to awake you or not. He just looked at you for a while, and then went out. Poor man! he seemed a good deal cut up about it. What a fortunate thing it was he did not go to the fête with the rest of them, for in that case he could not have got away by the noon train.”

I sat still for a little while, then took my cup back to the table and stole quietly away. I went into the ladies' room and fetched the plaid, which was lying on the sofa just as I had left it ten minutes before. I took it carefully, tenderly, and brought it up here into my own little room. Not all that I shall have to remember him by.

It is round me now, his plaid, as I sit here close by the window, still listening to that restless, sad voice of the waves, the only thing that never changes where all else changes so quickly. With a dim, vague sense of something gone, I hear the cool plashing sound of them as they break on the shingle, and then roll far away back again into the blue depth, hither and thither, hither and thither, swaying to and fro, now loud, now gentle, as I have listened to them so many times. Shall I ever listen to them again? Shall I ever come back again to this Scarbro', and look on the old Castle, and the far-reaching cliffs, and the great bold sweeping curves of the headlands — I, this Mabel, for whom the future and the past seem alike to have died out, and left nothing but a dreary, empty

*now?* And so I sat for some time, just saying over and over to myself, “Mr. Lowe is gone.”

And then, in the great darkness which came over me — in the utter, hopeless blank which had settled upon every place where he was not — in that dead, quiet silence which shadowed the whole wide circle of my thought,— I knew that it had come to me at last — the Awakener.

And now, Mabel, to your packing, for it is near upon midnight.

## CHAPTER III.

*Braeton, September.* — I have been at home a week — a whole long week.

As we left the Marbrook station, and came along the shaded road that leads past the wood up to Braeton, it seemed as if years and years had passed since I had seen those trees before, and listened to the birds singing in them and watched the long shadows drifting over the fields and hills — years, and it is only two little months.

What shall I say about all these things? I can only think of a single verse of a poem I read a long time ago, long before I knew what it meant: —

“My former life now seemed to me  
Such as hereafter death may be;  
When, in the great Eternity,  
We shall awake and find it day.”



The sun is going down behind Lingold wood, just as a week ago to-day I watched it go down behind the wolds and hills of Scarbro', while the old castle looked so warm and purple, and the waves crooned along over the sands. I wonder who is sleeping in my little room there now. I wonder who sits in that easy chair by the window. Mrs. Tresilis said she should like to have it when I was gone, for the time she stayed; so even now she may be there, looking out on the same scene, and listening to the same sounds, and thinking of me. For she will think of me, I know she will. Mr. Penarva will just be starting off for the promenade concert, and Mrs. Vere stitching away at that clenched fist of hers, and Isabella Ponde bamboozling poor Mr. Evenstill, and singing romantic songs to him until the young man's senses, together with his eyes and chin, mount to the third heaven.

I am afraid Maud thinks my temper not much improved since I came home. I don't think it is myself. I feel dreadfully restless and unsettled, and can hardly speak a straight word to anybody sometimes. Is it true what Mrs.

Tresilis said that night on the cliffs — “the end of all rest, the beginning of all tumult?” Almost, I think it is. Shall I ever again be what I used to be before I went there — ever walk quiet-hearted through my own world of thought, complete and sufficient in myself, alone? Perhaps, though, I would not return if I could. The tumult is even sweeter than the peace.

They often talk of Mr. Lowe — I mean Papa and Mamma and Maud. He launches out into praises of his kindness, his nobleness, his uprightness, and then appeals to me, saying, “Is it not so, Mabel? do you not think the same?” I can only say “yes,” and go quietly on with my painting. Maud thinks I have not enjoyed my visit so very much, because I do not speak of it often. She does not know yet that the things which lie nearest to our hearts have to be kept there.

Stephen Roden and Maud were waiting for us at the gate. After the first greetings were over, he took my hand in a quiet, brotherly sort of way, and put his other arm round her, and so we went up to the house, he between me and Maud. It will always be so now — he between me and Maud.

A touch of the old bitterness came over me as I saw how very happy she looked, with a happiness which even my coming home could scarcely brighten, it was so full-rounded and complete. But I must not murmur. Perhaps it is even the same with me. When I lie down at night, Maud's is not the last face that rises before me; when I wake in the morning, my dreams have not always been of her.

After tea we fell into our old places, Papa and Mamma to their own corner by the fire, glad and contented to be together once more; his slippers were put there ready for him, and his loose study-coat that he always wears in the house at home. Maud and Stephen together too in the window. I only sat alone. I suppose it is quite right; I am best, dearest, to no one. But will it always be so? I once thought that I had got used to being alone and having no one to care for me except in a general way. I don't exactly think so now; but perhaps the best thing is not to think about it at all. Only it must be very pleasant to know that somewhere in this great wide world there is one who cares for you above all others; who

would be first to come to you in sorrow or to rejoice with you in gladness, to whom your thoughts have a proud right to turn, true as the needle to the pole. It is natural to feel this way, I suppose, and to want some one to love us; but in that case we ought to pray for those who have all their lifetime been longing and hoping for this love, and have never, never found it.

Perhaps there may be many such.

How he pets Maud, how he follows her with his eye as she goes about the room, how he watches her tiny little white fingers as they twinkle over her work — I can't think how Maud manages to keep her hands so nice when she does so much in the house — how his face kindles when she comes near him, how his hand trembles, his great strong nervy hand, when he strokes her soft bright hair and plays with its long ringlets. Nobody ever caresses me, nobody ever pets me. I get nothing but respect, esteem, grave deference. Mamma once said in joke, one would as soon think of petting a young lioness as of petting me, and I suppose it is so. I can't fancy any one either calling me "little Mabel," as he calls her "little

Maud," his voice so deep and musical all the while. Little Maud, our little Maud!

Well, some sorts of people don't win love. They can give it, earnestly, truly — yes, they can, so much the worse for them — but they never get it back again, and that is an unsatisfactory transaction, looked at only in a commercial point of view. I get respect, that's all. How often have I listened to the cold words, "Miss Harcourt, I respect you," but no one ever yet said to me, "Mabel, I love you." I don't know that I ever cared until just now that anybody *should* say it either.

How soon one shakes down into the quiet routine of home. And yet I have a strange feeling of *mechanism* in all my duties now; it is not I myself who do them. That life, that other life of two short months, seems the real one, and this of daily cares and duties, only a dream from which by and by I shall awake. I have such a strange feeling, too, that this present time is a sort of parenthesis, something not in itself connected with anything else. It does not belong to me, nor I to it. Something seems to lie beyond it, to which it is but a

stepping-stone, to be passed over as quietly and patiently as may be.

Stephen Roden stayed long into the evening, hearing about Scarbro' and its belongings. When Papa mentioned Mr. Lowe's name, he seemed to remember it, and asked if he came from the North. We told him "yes," and then he said he remembered some one of that name when he was a youth in Scotland. Mrs. Lowe's husband had been a clergyman, and when he died she came with a daughter and this son to live for a while near Dunlaggan, where they had connections. He said they were an English family. After they had been there a year or two, the son Philip went back into England to Cambridge, to prepare for the church; and when he last heard of him, two or three years ago, he was rector of a country parish in Northumberland, and his mother lived with him. Stephen began to talk about him as he remembered him when a youth, — how steady he was even then, and grave, and thoughtful — how earnest to know the right and do it.

He need not have told us this. I had learned

it long before. He was very noble, this Philip Lowe; very worthy of all that I had given him, even my love. And it seemed to me then that I did not care to be loved in return, so long as I might only love him and keep him there in my thoughts, a presence of good continually.

Before Stephen went it was getting late, and I had gone into my room to unpack. Soon I heard his voice and hers in the hall, talking low together; then the door closed, and all was still. After that Maud came up to me as I sat before my portmanteau, and we had a long, long talk together. How pretty she looked sitting there by the fire, for it had begun to be cold at nights, and Mamma had ordered a fire for me this first evening; there was such a look of quiet, thorough, intense happiness on her face, and her hands were folded together — as Maud's always are when they are at rest — with that utter *abandon* of contentment. I often notice characters — women's especially — by the position of the hands when unemployed. Some tuck them one inside another like a pair of old gloves; others lay them straight and

even, like clothes folded ready for the mangle; others twitch and fidget, as if longing to be at work again; others fall into listless inanity. Miss Vere's used to double themselves like the fisted crest; Isabella Ponde's sprawled out in a loose, unprincipled style; Phebe Sharrup's looked as flabby and purposeless as a defunct sea anemone; but only a few have I seen that, like my sister Maud's, lie when at rest in such graceful, perfect repose, so quiet, yet so full of latent activity, so instinct with life and sensibility.

I drew my portmanteau up to the fire close beside her, and began to unpack as she sat on her low stool and watched me.

"Are you not sorry for my hat, Maud?" I said, showing her the poor thing with its trimmings all soaked and discoloured by the sea-water, yet more precious to me in that pitiful state than ever it had been in its palmyest days of pristine beauty.

"Ah! it is a pity," she said, and twisted the ribands round and round her fingers; "you know, Mabel, Mr. Roden came whilst I was doing up this hat of yours, and we were talk-



ing about you all the time, and saying we wished you had found some one to take care of you, and love you, and make you happy. I have so many things that bring him to my mind in that way now," and there came into her still face that beautiful flash of gladness which I always see there when she speaks of him. And I, too, as I laid it away, felt a sort of little rippling current of hope very new and strange to me.

Then there was my sea-weed, neatly pressed and dried—the sea-weed Mr. Lowe and I had gathered on the rocks that morning — purple, olive, crimson, dun-coloured, white, and that beautiful palmy leaf of green which had cost me so dear. How, standing there in my own little bedroom at home, with Maud by my side, and the firelight flickering over the walls, and the old familiar household sounds about me, my thoughts drifted away to that so far-off morning on the rocks with him, when the salt spray plashed up in our faces, and the tide eddied round our feet, and the sunshine gleamed and sparkled on the blue waves. More real it seemed to me,

though so long ago, than the things that surrounded me now.

“Mabel,” she said, and this time she came closer up to me, and put her arm in mine as she often does when we are talking, “Mabel, I could almost fancy that you don’t look just the same as you did before you went to Scarbro’. You have got a new expression. You remind me of the finishing tints you put upon your water-colour drawings to tone down the distances and make them all look soft and transparent. I wonder if you feel any way different, or is it only I that look at you with other eyes than I used to?”

I could not say anything to her; only, with the hand that was free, I kept turning over my sea-weeds, holding them up to the flickering light to see the wavy, graceful outline of the countless branching sprays. And after a while she began in her low sweet voice, as though following out some familiar train of thought that had been floating long through her mind and needed no effort to shape it into words:—

“Mabel, I do wish that you could find some

one that you could love; it would do you so much good, I think, Mabel. We only live a sort of half life until we begin to love; before, it is all for ourselves, afterwards it is all for others. And then it is so pleasant to feel that we have some one to lean upon and look up to; only, Mabel, you are so high and proud."

"Not now, Maud, not now," I thought, but said nothing.

"You stand so complete and sufficient in yourself, I am afraid for you sometimes that you will never know how sweet it is to *look up*. You seem to be made for others to cling to you, whilst you stand alone and self-supported. But surely it will come to you at last, this great, this beautiful gift. I hope you will know some day what it is to love."

I could not talk to her about it. I could not tell her that her sister Mabel, the proud, the haughty, the self-sustained, had come back helpless, humble as a child; with all that lath-and-plaster work of self-conceit swept utterly away, and a past left which only had to be mourned over and repented of. I could *look up* now — yes, I

could indeed. But I did not tell her so. I only kissed her and bade her good night, for it was very late. So she left me.

When she had gone I took his plaid — Mr. Lowe's plaid that he had put over me only the morning before — it had been laid away under my travelling cloak, for I did not want Maud to see it just then, and wrapping it close round me, I sat down in the great easy chair and fell to thinking.

It was very, very still, not even any wind to rustle the old beech tree leaves, or to bring up from Lingold wood that faint rushing whisper that I have so often sat here and listened to. I missed the pleasant sound of the waves that had grown familiar to me now, that regular flow and ebb of surf breaking on the rocks, and then rolling away back again into the sea. It was as when one turns to speak to a friend and he is gone. And then I thought over the old time again, and because I could hear the real sea no longer, I took down one of Aunt Miriam's great pink shells from the chimney-

piece, and held it close to my ear for a sort of echo of the sound I should hear again no more.

Maud wanted me to "look up." Yes, I was learning to do it. Perhaps, even in a higher sense than she thought of then, I may be learning that one great lesson of our lives. Perhaps through all these clouds and mists that have gathered round me so long, I may one day look up to see Him, "who for us men and our salvation came down from heaven."

For I know that I am on the threshold of a new life. Old things are passing away. As dry, withered, clasping leaves fall off that new buds may spring out into the sunshine, so that old life of mine is slowly and surely passing away from me. All that I trusted in, all that I built upon, is silently crumbling down; and I wait no longer proud or self-dependent, for that Divine hand which shall lead me forth to a higher, purer existence; one whose springs shall all be from above, whose aim shall be towards the highest.

And now, Maud, I begin to think again of that verse in your little birthday prayer-book: —  
“So He bringeth them to the haven where they would be!”

## CHAPTER IV.

MABEL had been at home nearly five weeks. People noticed that she was quieter than she used to be. The crust of hauteur had broken through in places, so that one could get a look down at something soft and warm beneath it. The little children, those quick interpreters of human nature, began to look more friendly at her as her tall, stately figure swept across the village green. One little urchin, standing at his mother's garden gate, was venturesome enough, as she passed it on her morning walk, to offer her a bit of honeysuckle which grew over the palings; and when Mabel, glad not for the gift, but for the hinting of affection, or at least kindly feeling, so new to her, stooped down to thank him, stroking back his curly hair and smiling in his face,

he ran away into the cottage to tell his mother that he didn't believe Miss Harcourt ever carried a black monkey on her shoulder, and that she had the most beautifullest eyes he had ever seen in all his life, and he would gather her a bit of honeysuckle every morning, that he would, as long as it lasted. And when, next time she passed, she had two rosy apples ready for the little watcher, his admiration knew no bounds, and he was ready henceforth to do battle to the death with the juvenile democrats of the village green, who were accustomed to make faces at her behind her back, and mimic with their little stumpy figures her regal step and gesture while she walked unconsciously on.

For Mabel Harcourt was no favourite in Braeton. The cottage matrons stigmatised her as "awful proud," and declared that she had such a way with her it was enough to freeze a cucumber, let alone Christian flesh and blood; and if by any chance she strayed into their dominions to inquire after sick children, or take a message from her sister Maud, they felt "kind o' skeered like, and couldn't frame to get a decent answer



off their tongues; she fixed 'em to sich a degree wi' her stiff uprightness." But indeed, there had come a change over her; a "finishing tone" as Maud called it, softening down all the lines of her face, mellowing the keen, proud glance of her dark eyes, and bending the curves of the haughty figure into somewhat more of womanly sweetness. And her voice had a new sound, not perceptible perhaps to chance listeners, which told of deeper thoughts within. All sure indices of that other life which had come over her, which was by and by to blend the jarring tones of the outer one, and round the angles of her proud self-dependent nature. Yet not sufficient, for the present, to change that impression of her which had been growing these many years past in the hearts of the simple Braeton folk, who looked not much below the surface, and could only judge from the outward mien and gesture, which were very proud still.

It was a warm October afternoon, when the sunlight sprinkles the decaying leaves as if with threads of gold, quivering and sparkling upon their crimson beauty; and when the atmosphere

has that soft, delicious, purple haze which saddens after a week or two into the grey mists and fogs of early autumn. Maud and Mabel were coming home from the village, where they had been to see some of the poor women, and had reached the beech-tree walk on which the fallen leaves cracked and rustled under their feet with a pleasant crispy sound. The great Virginian creeper that wound round the south gable of the Lodge shone one burning mass of crimson foliage, and two or three starry jasmine blossoms, the last of all the year, peeped palely out from amid their already browning leaves. And asters, purple, pink, and white, smiled royally upon the flower-beds, and one tall, brilliant sunflower turned its broad disc round towards the west for all the light it could gather, a great, proud, kingly flower, so autumnal-looking in its bravery.

The two girls loitered, walking up and down in the slant sunshine, watching the brown leaves as they fluttered down to the grass, and were then crushed beneath their feet. And through the fast-thinning branches of the orchard trees, they could see Lingold wood, one gorgeous sweep of

russet, gold, and crimson, picked out here and there by the clear black outlines of the pines, and the beautiful dark green arrowy spikes of the spruce firs; and far away back where the hills rose beyond the lake, fell the softest, tenderest haze, melting imperceptibly away into the warm tints of coming sunset, and reflecting its glow upon the meadows and uplands that stretched towards Mossingay.

There was a bright look on Mabel's face, a calm, expectant gladness, very different from its usual expression of stately self-dependence and repose; and in all her ways there was a new, gentle sweetness, as of one for whom life holds some great treasure which must be guarded reverently. Maud saw it, but she did not know why it was there. She only knew that it seemed to strengthen the bond between them; that something in her sister's look led her to speak of thoughts and feelings which before had been held back with a fear lest no response should be found for them in that proud self-reliant heart.

They were still sauntering side by side along

the beech-tree walk, when the leaves behind them were scattered to and fro by a brisk, light tread, and turning to look they beheld the brown alpaca dress and Dunstable bonnet of Miss Gabbatis careering at full speed towards them, accompanied by the green silk umbrella and a black velvet bag filled to apoplectic proportions by sundry parcels, whose ends and corners stuck out at the top.

“And so dear Miss Mabel has got home from Scarbro’; well, I *am* glad, and looking so well too, quite a colour I declare! I always say there’s nothing like the sea-side, nothing, for bracing people up and making them look nice. Not but what you were always very personable, my dear, but you struck me as being rather pale before you went away, and a little colour, just a very little you know, is such an improvement to a face. I was always very fond of a bit of colour, and it used to be rather an affliction that I could never get any into my face, try as I would, except a little patch on the bridge of my nose when I’d been eating too much pie for dinner; but I’ve got over that now, and learned to

be content with what Providence sees fit to give me."

"You seem as if you had been to Marbrook, by the looks of that bag," said Maud, with a glance at the labouring satchel, which was bumping about from side to side on the arm of Miss Gabbatis, "will you come in and rest yourself awhile?"

"Just the very thing I came for, and I should have proposed it myself, my dear Miss Maud, if you hadn't asked me. You see I lay in a stock of groceries once a month, and I always make a point of bringing them home myself, because then I know I get what I buy; and really people now have such tricks that you are imposed on at all ends and sides; but you know, when you *see* your things weighed out and wrapped up, that you get fair play. Not but what it's rather troublesome. You see I've got the soap and candles, and black lead, and baking-powder in this satchel, and then look here,"—and Miss Gabbatis whisked up the top flounce of her brown alpaca, and exhibited a deep pocket filled to as alarming a state of repletion

as the satchel — “you see I keep this for the eatables, and there’s another on the other side to balance, or I should be all one side. They’re nice and handy for sugar and tea, and coffee and spices, and anything of that sort. You see, having connections in the church, I don’t feel it suitable to my position to carry a basket, or that would do the whole thing at once. I saw one only last night at old Bernerd’s, that was just what I want — with a shut-down lid, and little places partitioned off for different articles; but you know family[connections are a serious thing, and it isn’t everybody that has a position, and I’m sure my dear brother at the University wouldn’t feel easy about it if he knew that I fetched my groceries home from the market town in a basket; it has such a very vulgar sound. Now you see this black bag does the thing genteelly. They just fit in as nicely as can be, [and people don’t know but what it’s a piece of fancy work that I’m taking out to tea, or a few delicate biscuits for an invalid person. And as for the pockets, you know, they are quite buried in oblivion, so that really if my

brother were the bishop himself, I shouldn't feel it at all unsuitable to wear them."

They had reached the house now, and Miss Gabbatis began to smooth herself ready for going in. Mabel just waited to see her comfortably fixed in the dining-room, and then went up stairs to her own room, where she staid until quite evening.

"It's such an advantage when one can buy one's things wholesale," said Miss Gabbatis, recurring to her groceries, which she had taken out of her pockets and packed up in a snug little heap on a table in the corner. "Now there's this tea that I got from Mr. Sharrup's because there's nowhere else to get it from; why, Mrs. Harcourt, I do assure you it's no more like tea than I'm like a married lady, and I'm sure no one ever says I have any appearance of that sort; it really is quite depressing, the immorality of tradesmen under the present dispensation. I could tell you a little circumstance now, about that last pound of tea that I got from Mr. Sharrup's, which would astonish you, Mrs. Harcourt, it would indeed,

not that I wish to injure the business at Ceylon House, I wouldn't do such a wicked thing for the world; but I really have felt it on my mind just to mention it to a private friend some of these days, in strict confidence you know; it was so very curious, and almost I might say amusing, only one has an objection to be imposed upon. But if I'm going to have a little bit of chat, I may as well get my work and settle down. I always carry a little work about with me, you know, Mrs. Harcourt, in case I get drawn out into conversation, and then I don't seem to be wasting my time." And Miss Gabbatis produced from the left pocket a piece of netting, which has made its appearance before the public on a previous occasion.

"It was that pound of tea I was going to tell you about. Well, you know, my little maid Sally hadn't had very great educational advantages before she came to me; in fact, poor child, she hadn't got beyond saying her Creed and stumbling over a chapter in the New Testament; and as to what I call useful knowledge, she couldn't tell the height of a single mountain in



the world, nor what arrow-root, and tapioca, and camphor, and those sorts of things are made from, nor whether the moon was a dark lantern hung out of somebody's top garret window, or one of the heavenly bodies; in fact, I may say

ithout exaggeration, her mind was a complete desert. Of course it wasn't allowed to remain in that way when she came under my care. You know I always make a point of carrying on the ducation of my maids just, you understand, to keep myself in practice, for I always bear in mind the possibility that such a thing *might* happen as that I should be called upon in the order of Providence to marry a widower with a young family. Such things are happening every day, you know, Mrs. Harcourt, and a respectable elderly female, who has connections in the church, is by no means unlikely to be sought out for that position."

Mrs. Harcourt smiled as the possibility rose before her, and remarked that very strange things certainly *did* happen sometimes.

"Exactly so. I'm glad you view it in the same light as I do. I mentioned it to a lady

the other day, and she quite laughed it to scorn; but I say it's well to be prepared for anything that may hand out for us. So I hear Sally read the Psalms every morning after the dinner is settled about, and in the afternoon I give her a little instruction in plain sewing, and then at night, when the work is off her mind, and her mental energies are quite free and untrammelled, I put her through a course of useful knowledge.

“Well, one evening, shortly after I got my last groceries from Mr. Sharrup's, the lesson was upon *Tea*. I read her an account of its cultivation, of the country where it is produced, the manner of gathering it; and then followed a description of its personal appearance, which said that Congo—the kind I generally use for my own drinking, being cheap and of a good useful quality—has a leaf serrated at the edges, deeply veined in the centre, and tapering off to a delicate point at both extremities. You'll find it, Miss Maud, in the Handbook to Useful Knowledge.

“‘Now Sally,’ I said, ‘do you understand that?’

“ ‘Why, ma’am,’ she said, ‘it sounds kind o’ queer like.’

•  
“You see she has a very limited range of words, and doesn’t comprehend anything out of the common way in language. So I said to her, ‘Now Sally, you shall have an object lesson on this chapter.’ I’m so fond of object lessons, Mrs. Harcourt, they do simplify things so, and you know, I can’t bear anything that isn’t taught *practically*; mere theoretical knowledge is my horror; and I told her to fetch the jar of tea-leaves out of the kitchen, and we’d illustrate the subject.

“Sally was off in a twinkling, and brought me the jar. She has a wonderful thirst for knowledge has that girl, and swallows facts as fast as I can put them into her. Indeed, her pursuit of practical information is quite marvellous. I happened to come down stairs very early one morning when we’d been having an object lesson on mechanics the night before, and I found her with a brush under one arm, and the black-lead pot under the other, swinging the lid of my workbox backwards and forwards, and balancing the tray

up and down. When I inquired into it, she said she was studying the direction of forces, and of course I was satisfied, though I have never been able to get it quite off my mind that she was trying to find out if there was a bit of tape that would do for her apron strings.

“Well, we got the jar set upon the table. ‘Now, Sally,’ I said, ‘you go through that description again.’

“So Sally went through it very correctly, I enlightening her meanwhile as to what the words meant.

“‘A small leaf, serrated at the edges.’

“‘That means jagged in and out, like the teeth of our meat saw that hangs up behind the back kitchen door,’ I said.

“‘Yes ’m,’ said Sally as briskly as you please, and went on.

“‘Tapering to a delicate point at both ends.’

“‘Like our nutmeg grater that I use when I spice the rice puddings; and veined down the middle means that there’s a mark goes all along, like the channels in our best gravy dish that we

have on Sundays and Christmas Day. Now, Sally, are you sure you quite understand?’

“ ‘Why, Ma’am, I kind o’ forgets ought ’mazin’ quick; hadn’t I better fetch yon things you said, t’ nutmeg grater an’ saw, an’ set ’em right afore me, to think me on like? I can mind t’ dish, ’cause we uses it so oft.’

“ Well, do you know, I thought that was a very good suggestion, and besides made the thing more of an object lesson; so Sally went and fetched the nutmeg grater and saw, and spread them out on the parlour table, and then I got a piece of clean white paper—why, in fact, it was the back of a receipt which Mrs. Herman Kaye’s cook had given me for pickling tongues—and we set to in good earnest, and I thought we were going to have such a successful lesson. ‘Now then, Sally,’ I said, ‘begin;’ and she fished up a leaf out of the jar, the first that came to hand, and laid it out on the paper, while I sat beside her with my knitting, ready to show her how exactly it corresponded with the description given in the Handbook to Useful Knowledge. Sally looked very hard, first at the nutmeg grater

and then at the leaf, and then at the grater again.

“ ‘ Please ’m, this here don’t tipper to a pint at either end at all, at all ; it’s just fair and even all t’ way round, like them sloe leaves Jim and me gathered last fall to make a wash for mother’s face.’

“ ‘ It’s got in by a mistake,’ I said ; ‘ you’d better try another.’

“ Sally got another leaf and laid it out in state upon the paper.

“ ‘ Please ’m, it’s marry to yon t’other, there ain’t a bit o’ difference betwixt ’em ; them there’s nought but sloes for certain.’

“ ‘ It’s another mistake, Sally ; I don’t remember learning, when I was a girl at school, that sloe leaves were indigenous to China. Try again.’

“ Sally took a third leaf and spread it carefully out upon the paper, smoothing it nicely down with her fingers, and then she looked at the saw, and then at the nutmeg grater, and then at the specimen, and then at me ; and I waited to hear what would come out next.

“ ‘ Please ’m,’ she said, after a good long study, ‘ this here ain’t neither like t’ nutmeg grater nor

t' saw, and it ain't got no mark like our best gravy dish. Here's a great 'un shoots up in t' middle with a little 'un of each side; 'pears to me as how it's most like them brambles as grows on Braeton road hedge. D'ye think, Ma'am, it's another mistake?'

" 'I'm afraid it is, Sally,' I said; and do you know, Mrs. Harcourt, I really began to feel quite uncomfortable. You see, for a person who only has a limited income, it isn't exactly the thing to be giving five shillings a pound for sloe and bramble leaves, and I thought my object lesson was going to turn out a blank after all."

"Or rather a course of roadside botany," suggested Maud.

"Well, it did look like that, didn't it? But I thought we'd have one more try before we gave it up, for Sally knew where the tea had come from, and I didn't want to have Mr. Sharrup lowered in her estimation. You know I think position's a very necessary thing to be kept up, and although I don't suppose Mr. Sharrup has any connections in the church, yet he has a position, such a one as it is, and it ought

to be properly looked to and kept up. So in went Sally's fingers a fourth time, and fetched out another specimen. She fumbled and pinched about at it a good while, but it didn't seem to come into any sort of shape to speak of, and at last she said,

“ ‘Please ’m, it ain't a leaf at all, at all; it's just nothing no more but a bit o' chip. I'm thinking, Ma'am, it's a mistake entirely is the tea.’

“ ‘Try again, Sally,’ I said, and I couldn't help beginning to feel the fun of the thing, though it really was rather vexing to think of the various descriptions of home produce which I had been speculating upon in place of Chinese leaves. But this time Sally was triumphant.

“ ‘I've gotten it, Ma'am,’ she cried out, and jumped up with such a jerk. You know she's so very demonstrative is Sally, and has no notion of restraining her feelings; and it made me let down a whole row of stitches, besides giving me quite a turn, for my nerves have never been very strong since that awkward circumstance of Mrs. Gosler getting wedged in the roof door, that I told you of a little while ago.



“ ‘I’ve gotten it, Ma’am; you see this here tippers to a pint like t’ nutmeg grater, and jaggles in and out marry to t’ saw, and has a place for gravy to run into along t’ middle. Then the others was all mistakes, Ma’am, was they?’

“ ‘I am afraid they were, Sally,’ I said.

“ ‘Then must I tell Mr. Sharrup so, Ma’am, when I go for t’ candles next time, an’ ax him how they got there? Happen yon apprentice boy of his likes a joke—them boys does sometimes—and puts ’em in for a bit of a spree.’

“I couldn’t find it in my heart to sully the unsuspecting honesty of Sally’s virgin bosom by telling her that I believed Mr. Sharrup knew all about it, and I thought it was quite as well for his position as a respectable man that she should put her own construction on the affair; so I told her it would perhaps be best to say no more about it, — mistakes happened sometimes in the best-regulated families. And then, as I saw she’d quite a notion of carrying on the conversation, — for Sally’s of a very inquiring turn of mind, and has quite a tendency towards the deductive philosophy, — I sent her upstairs

to turn the beds down. And so we finished our object lesson on tea, and I can't say that since then I've enjoyed my cup in an afternoon quite so much as I used to do. Not that I bear any ill will to Mr. Sharrup, nothing of the sort; but you know I think it's just as well to gather one's own brambles and sloe leaves as to pay five shillings a pound for them. But, dear me, I declare it's getting quite late. The time does slip along so when one's having a nice little bit of chat."

And indeed the time *was* slipping away. While Miss Gabbatis had been relating her domestic experiences, the red sunlight had died off from the old beech tree and left it brown and sombre, its sparsely scattered leaves darkening upon the pale sky. And the Downshire hills, that peaked up along the horizon, had doffed their purple robes and laid away the golden coronets with which the sun had crowned them an hour ago, and wrapped themselves up for the night in a quiet suit of grey. The shadows of evening came into the crimson-curtained room, lurking about in the half-darkened

corners, and playing hide-and-seek with the flickering firelight; making Mrs. Harcourt put aside her delicate lace-work and lean back in her rocking-chair to enjoy blind man's holiday for a while. Miss Gabbatis began to pack up her netting and peer round into the corner where her groceries lay *perdu*; but she left them there in peace, and resumed her half-folded work with a very contented air, at a gentle suggestion from Maud that she should stay and take a cup of tea with them, for before she could reach home the mists would have begun to fall.

“So thoughtful of you, my dear Miss Maud, and I'm sure I'll do it with the greatest of pleasure; though really your Papa and Miss Mabel will think I'm always staying. I'm sure I shall be quite ashamed to face him when he comes in out of his study, and Mrs. Harcourt will begin to think she must give orders to have a cup and saucer set for me in a general way. But, as you say, these mists are dangerous, though I am thankful to say I don't profess to be delicate. Still, you know, health's a

blessing, and I consider it my duty to pay proper attention to it, in case I *should* ever be called upon to undertake the charge of a family."

"Why, Miss Gabbatis, you've made us quite curious; we shall begin to look at the widowers in this neighbourhood with an eye to consequences."

"Oh, Mrs. Harcourt!" and Miss Gabbatis proceeded to take off her bonnet and shawl, and dispose them neatly on a corner of the sofa. "I don't expect any consequences, I'm sure I don't. I've passed the time of life now for looking out after consequences. But, you know, since I've heard of Miss Nunly's sister being likely to be married to that gentleman with a family of children, that lives along on the Marbrook road, I really *have* thought that things *do* turn out very strangely sometimes. I'm sure if there ever was an old maid she is one; but some people go through the wood and pick up a stick at the very end, where nobody would have thought there were any left. And I was told, but I don't know if it's to be depended

on, that we've got another widower coming to live at Braeton next Lady Day, with four children, and his wife dead three years. She went off in a decline, so the children are delicate, which is a good thing, for they're all girls."

"And why is it a good thing, Miss Gabbatis, for girls to be delicate?"

"Because they're more likely to die, my dear. I'm never sorry when I hear of women dying; present company excepted, you understand, Mrs. Harcourt." Miss Gabbatis waited for a response.

Mrs. Harcourt did understand, and signified the same, whereupon Miss G. continued,—

"I'm never sorry when I hear of women dying, because there's such an overplus of female population in this neighbourhood. Why, do you know, at the last census Braeton was more than two-thirds of it women; and I'm told that Marbrook is even worse. It really is becoming downright serious, and government ought to take it into consideration, and issue a law about having the community more equally divided. Whenever I take up a local paper about here,

I always pounce upon the births and deaths, and balance them up, to see which has the advantage; and when I hear of a little girl being born, I say to myself, 'Poor thing, I wonder if she'll ever get married.' We shall have nothing but old maids and single women in Braeton by and by."

"But you will allow that old maids are very useful," said Maud.

"So they are, my dear; but everybody knows that it is possible to have too much of a good thing. You see in Marbrook they're overrun with sewing meetings, and bazaars, and working parties, and ladies' committees, just because there are so many single women who have nothing to keep them at home, and no duties to attend to; and as for the gossip that gets done at those places, why the less said about it the better."

"But don't married people talk too?"

"Not so much, Mrs. Harcourt, not so much. Why, I never heard you say a bit of gossip yet, and I've been in and out of your house these twenty years. No, it's the old maids

that do it all; and there really are such lots of them about here, it's perfectly tedious. Now just think of that row where Miss Tim lives, on the Marbrook road, — eight houses, and only three gentlemen in the whole lot. Four of them inhabited by old maids who never have a hat hanging up in their passages from January to December, except when the clergyman calls to see them, or they fall ill and have to send for the doctor; one of them occupied by a widow with three unmarried daughters that haven't a brother amongst them, and the other three by Mrs. Stanley, and Mrs. Prescott, and Mrs. Taylor, whose respective husbands are the only male individuals in the row. Now count them up: four old maids with a servant apiece, that's eight; the widow and her three daughters, and two servants, that's fourteen; the three married ladies and three more servants, that's twenty. Twenty ladies and three gentlemen, — now that's just what I call shocking."

"Yes, it's a very alarming phase of social economy," said Maud, with] a delicate little touch of merriment in her voice.

“Alarming, my dear! — it’s more than that a great deal; it’s perfectly horrifying, and ought to be represented to the government at once. Nothing succeeds at Marbrook but drapers’ shops and fancy-work repositories. I believe there are only three tailors’ shops in the place. And then just give a look nearer home, and see what is the state of the case in Braeton.”

“Well, I can’t say I ever thought about it.”

“No, my dear, I’m sure you haven’t, or you would speak with more feeling. Now just think of the eligible young ladies, and you’re out of count directly. Three Miss Ducies, and pretty Miss Brown, and Mrs. Herman Kaye’s daughter, and two Miss Smiths, and two Miss Fairlys, and two Miss Whites, and Miss Freer and her cousin that lives with her, and the youngest Miss Farbelook, besides a whole tribe of school-girls that will be out in society next Christmas at the latest; and to set against all these you have about half a dozen gentlemen — why, only five, in fact, for one of them got nipped up by that Miss Stanton that came to visit her



aunt last Christmas, and they'll be married in less than six months, so he don't count."

"That was rather a hard case, for any one to visit Braeton on such an expedition."

"Hard! Miss Maud; why, I call it *infamous* for people to come poaching on our preserves in that way, and so little game as there is even for regular licensed shooters. We shall want some matrimonial game-laws by and by to protect the rights of female residents. Of course it's a different thing when birds leave the wood and get fired at, though I must say I always feel very jealous even about that. I never like to hear of our gentlemen going to visit their friends at a distance; but *poaching*, Miss Maud, — poaching is a thing I never could endure."

And Miss Gabbatis netted away quite ferociously.

"It's a different thing," she continued, being warmed into eloquence by the importance of the subject, "it's a different thing when young ladies go away and do a stroke of business. I'm sure it was quite a load off my mind when Miss Ducie got engaged to that gentleman at Manchester,

and Miss Phebe Sharrup came home from Scarbro' to prepare her wedding clothes, as I suppose she has done. I only wish a few more would try the same sort of thing. And then just think what a commotion it makes when a fresh gentleman comes to settle down in Braeton, a single one I mean. I'm sure, when Mr. Roden came to the Mossingay agency, I thought the mammas in the place would have worried him. I heard of his being asked to so many tea-parties, and pic-nics, and balls, and musical evenings; and if he happened to see a young lady home, it was put down as quite a settled thing. I once thought I would keep a list of the young ladies I heard laid out for him, but I lost count in no time, and gave it up. And then to think, Miss Maud, that he should just fix upon the very one that had never been thought of, and that he had never paid any attention to! Really things *do* turn out so strangely. But I was very glad when I heard of it, for, do you know, Miss Maud, though I never breathed a whisper to any one, I used to think how nicely he would do for you if he had only been a clergyman instead of an agent.

Maud smiled and went on with her sewing, but said nothing.

“It’s very remarkable that I never heard Miss Mabel laid out for anybody, but somehow she has a way with her that people daren’t take a liberty even with her name. She would fly up so, not into a temper, you know—I don’t remember that Miss Mabel ever used to indulge herself in that sort of thing—but she has such an unaccountable dignity about her, that really people change their voices when they speak to her. And then, you know, with keeping herself so much aloof from society, that makes a difference; but I don’t wonder, for I’m sure there’s no one here but Miss Nunly that’s good enough to hold a candle up to her. And that reminds me I called in at the Abbey Close as I came from Marbrook, and I thought her looking rather low-spirited.”

“I have often noticed that she does so as the time for the October races comes on,” said Mrs. Harcourt; “it brings so much wickedness into the town.”

“Well, yes, so it does; but when it can’t be

helped, I don't see much use in making oneself uncomfortable about it; and besides, it doesn't affect her. Now there's poor Mrs. Stead, at the bank, you know, her son's gone regularly wild; got led away with gambling and betting, and that sort of thing, and of course it's only to be expected, when the race time comes round, that she feels it on her mind rather, and wonders how he is going on; but I can't understand Miss Nunly putting herself about, especially as she doesn't see anything of it from her room window. You know she mostly lives to the back, in that wainscoted parlour that looks down to the river; a nice comfortable room it is, too, perhaps *rather dark*, and I don't know that I should like those rooks for a continuance, especially on wet days; but for a maiden lady nothing could be more secluded and comfortable. And then, living just under the shelter of the abbey walls, too, it gives any one such an air of respectability, and almost answers the same purpose as having connections in the church."

"I understand the great race is next Tuesday."

“Yes, and a concert in the evening, or rather an opera, only they’re going to have it in the concert hall, because we haven’t got a theatre at Marbrook ; a very good thing, too ; I never could receive the drama as a proper thing, particularly in a small town. It’s going to be full dress, and they’ve got the satins and laces put out in the shops already for the ladies to choose. I always say our concert hall must look very pretty on a full dress night, though I never saw it myself, because there are so few black coats, nothing but ladies, and rosy cheeks, and white shoulders. I should rather like to hear Clarelli sing, if I had a gentleman to go with ; but they say she’s not a very reputable lady, so perhaps it’s better for my position to stay at home. And now, dear Miss Maud, as it’s getting very dark, and we can’t see to work any longer, *will* you give us a tune,—something nice and merry, please ? ”

Meanwhile Mabel had been sitting by her room window writing, and when it got too dark for that, she looked out into the twilight with a pleasant smile. Let us see what it was about.

## CHAPTER V.

*Braeton, October 6th.*—I have come up here into my little room this afternoon to write. I once thought I should never care to write any more. I once thought the best of my life was gone, and that what remained of it could never be anything but a quiet, patient, weary waiting. But it is not so now.

I am very happy, very happy indeed. Mr. Lowe is coming to see us next week.

I knew I should see him again sometime; I was quite sure of it, but not so soon as this. Only three days—before this little lingering jasmine bud, the last of them all, that hangs over my window, has come into flower, he will be here. Rich Mabel! Happy Mabel!

It was this morning—I was going out for a

walk and took the letters from the postman just as I was starting. There was a little note for Maud from Stephen Roden, and a letter for Papa in a hand I did not know,—a strong, heavy, firm hand, such as I think I should write myself if I was a man. But Papa has so many letters from professors and learned people now that he is busy over his book on Astronomy, that I did not take particular notice of it. I gave Maud hers, and watched the ripple of gladness come over her face as she took it and ran away to her own room; then I left Papa's on the study table, and set off for my walk through the village.

How pretty it looked in this early October sunshine! There was a fresh, crisp, frosty feel in the air, the blue mist lay upon the meadows and over the woods, and gathered softer and thicker towards the lake in the park; and from the hedge sides there floated those long filmy threads, spangled over with dew-drops, which our old Irish nurse used to tell us were made by the Virgin Mary, spinning robes for the angels. It seemed to me, too, that the old church had never looked so peaceful as it did this morning,

with the cool light shining down upon its grey battlements, and over the stone dials on the low, square turret, and glinting bright and sudden upon the glossy ivy leaves which creep round the window just over our pew. Was it a fore-taste of coming joy which made me happier this morning,—the sweep and rush of angels' wings coming near and near? I don't know, but every thing seemed beautiful. As I walked along, the little children going to school looked, I thought, more friendly at me, and the sturdy labourers, tramping along, said their rough greeting more pleasantly, and old Lizzy Machin, standing in her cottage door, wished me good morning with a kinder face than she has ever turned on me before. Somehow I felt drawn to the old woman, and went in and read her a chapter. I don't much know what parts of the Bible are best to read to old women, but her great brown leather-covered book opened at that chapter in Isaiah about the desert rejoicing and blossoming as the rose; so I read that, as it came first; and she seemed to enjoy it, for she said, "Happen ye'll come agin, Miss, afore long." I promised I would.



After I left her I bethought me to go and see that poor girl, the gamekeeper's daughter, who has been such a long time in a consumption. I had a nice quiet talk with her about her brother who is a soldier in India, and I am going to write to him for her. Her mother was very pleased I had gone, and asked me if I would go again, for she said a little company cheered her daughter up so much. I will take her a few flowers next time. I do think now I shall never sit up any more at my room window, moping for want of something to do. And then I came home again.

Maud was in the garden, trimming that sweet-briar bush that Stephen Roden gave her last spring. When she saw me she stopped and said:

"Well Mabel, he is coming, this Mr. Lowe, that Papa talks about so much, and I shall see if it is all true. He has to exchange duties with our clergyman next Sunday, and he has written to Papa to say that if it is convenient he will stay with us a night or two. He will be here on Saturday afternoon, and Papa says he shall keep

him over the missionary meeting on Wednesday if he can stay."

And then she went on trimming and cutting the sweetbriar, reverently gathering up the stray leaves, as if everything that belonged to any gift of his must be most tenderly cared for. And the old quiet light came sunning back over her face.

When little joys and gladnesses come, we sparkle up and say, "I am so happy, it will be so pleasant;" and the feeling in our half-empty hearts bubbles over with a noisy effervescence. But when a great earnest hope, that has been growing for a long time, suddenly springs into blossom, we say nothing about it. At first we can only look at it, silently, solemnly, and be thankful,—as I was then. I don't know if I said anything to Maud, I think I only told her that Papa would be very glad to see Mr. Lowe again. Then I went on in a sort of dream, scarcely knowing whither I went, into the dining-room. There was no one there, so I sat down in my little low chair by the fire and began to think about it.

I believe, in years to come, if I should have much of pure, full happiness granted to me,—I believe if God gives to me all that in days past I have hoped and longed and prayed for, henceforth to be always mine,—I shall never again know an hour so perfectly, so entirely bright as that one I spent this morning alone in the dining-room; never one again so full of rest, so full of hope fulfilled, so full of clear, bright, actual peace. I know nothing like it has ever come to me before; I think nothing like it can ever come again. It was one of those golden drops that fall into the goblet of life once—just once, wherein all heaven's sunlight is mirrored.

I think I must have sat there a long time, with no other thought than this, "I shall see Mr. Lowe on Saturday." I neither thought of the past, with the pleasant times we had spent together, nor yet of any future possibilities of happiness beyond that meeting time. It was one of those few, those very few times of our lives, in which the present is enough for us, in which we can say, quite apart from hope or memory, "I am happy now."

When I woke up from that half dream, I saw his letter on the table. It is lying before me now as I write, short, comprehensive, business-like and gentlemanly, just such as Mr. Lowe would be sure to send, and the date line at the top, — “Elverton Rectory,” — that is where he lives, I suppose. Then he goes on to say that he has to exchange duties with Mr. Eden next Sunday, and will much enjoy staying with Papa, if convenient. He doesn't send any kind regards to me, as most people would do who had had two months of my charming society ; he is not one of those who deal in unmeaning compliments ; but after saying that the train will arrive at Marbrook at half-past six on Saturday evening, he just signs himself “Yours sincerely, Philip Lowe.” Last time I saw that name was in his prayer-book, at the old church at Scarbro'. I did not think then I could ever learn to look at it as I do now. I did not think it could ever come to be so much to me. I will put the letter away in my desk, side by side with that green, paling leaf of seaweed that I gathered on the rocks. Papa won't ask for it again ; he is very careless

about his letters ; and I see that Maud has already torn off the blank side of the sheet—careful little thing that she is—to be ready to fold round our newspapers for India.

Only three days more, and he will be here. But perhaps — no, I won't make any doubts ; it is all well. Next time I sit in our old pew at church, it will be to hear him preach ; — not the first sermon you have preached to me, Mr. Lowe, independent of that continual homily of your daily life which spoke more earnestly than any other words you could say. How strange it all seems ! I could think it was a dream, but for the letter. When I look at *that* all is bright again. No, it is my real life which is coming to me, and these last few weeks at Braeton the dream from which I am awaking — as I knew I should awake some time.

I like to mark these days that bring me great happiness, by sending a faint little reflection of it to others. He taught me this too. After that waking dream of mine in the dining room was over, and I could look without being dazzled on the great light that has come upon me, I tried to

think what I could do. Ah! when we have lived to ourselves for a long time, we don't even know how to begin to live for others. First of all I went and read to Mamma in the drawing room. I know she likes me to read to her whilst she sits back in the easy chair doing that lace work of hers, for much reading wearies her eyes, and even the holding of that great book we have got from Mudie's now tires her. And yet it is weeks and weeks—never since we went to Scarbro'—that I have offered to do it. We had a pleasant time together; and then she spoke of the little household arrangements that would want making for Mr. Lowe's visit. Maud generally looks after everything of this sort, but Mamma thought, as I knew a little of his ways already,—is it only a little, Mamma?—I should be better able to make things comfortable for him. How nice it will be to have to do it! What a new bright feeling of interest will come over all those trifling domestic affairs which used to be such a bore to me! Then I went and took Mary Wright that old stuff dress which has been hanging useless in my wardrobe so long, though the thought came over me, when

it was too late, that the present would have been a more valuable one if I had made a few alterations in the fashion of it before it had gone, but that idea will come in useful another time. As she curtsied and wept her thanks, I passed them on mentally to you, Mr. Lowe. This evening I will go and see the gamekeeper's daughter again, and take her those flowers. Poor girl! she had got a few buttercups and fern leaves arranged in a white mug by her bedside. What else is there that I can do?

I know now. I will write to Mrs. Tresilis. She told me once how lonely she should be when I was gone, and she gave me her London address. I will begin to-morrow. It is easier to write some things than it is to say them. I will try to send pleasant, hopeful words to her, comforting words. When should I be able to comfort others if not now, when every sentence will be steeped in the light of present gladness, though it is a gladness that I must not tell her? Poor Mrs. Tresilis! And I am so happy, and she is so weary. Will she ever come to rest, I wonder? Will she ever get safely anchored in the haven where

she would be? — a surer resting place than that vague “great hereafter” of which she spoke so sadly. Shall we ever both stand in that glorious coming time, and say of every step in this life’s journey — “It is well?” Poor Mrs. Tresilis! I never prayed for her before; I will do so henceforth.

And now, this still, dreamy October afternoon, sitting here so quietly in my room, and watching the shadows of early twilight creep up, soft and grey, over those far off Downshire hills, and the long sweeping lines of Lingold wood, — let me think of my great joy. Let me set it clearly, bravely before me, holding it arm’s length, as we do some just welcomed friends for a searching, truthful look, ere they are taken to our hearts, to be held there close and warm for ever. Yes, it is really so; it is quite true. It might be a dream, but his letter is here, matter of fact and straightforward. Let me say it over again: “On Saturday, if all is well, I hope to be with you.” Saturday evening, the closing up of toil, the prelude of rest, — Saturday evening, when, down among the little



white cottages of Braeton, so many honest, strong-handed, stronger-hearted men will be sitting among their wives and little ones, with no thought of coming labour with coming morning. Saturday evening, when the Sabbath is nigh at hand. Perhaps *my* Sabbath, too, is not far off. Perhaps my long week of tumult is passing away, and with that glorious day the rest shall begin,—the true rest.

Amen, so let it be. And with this thought I will shut my book. Next time I open it, it will be to say that he is come, that he is here. Happy Mabel!

## CHAPTER VI.

*Braeton, October 11th.*—I have got up very early this morning that I might write my story while it is yet fresh and young upon me. Not that it ever can be old, but yet I might forget some little thing, and I want to remember it entirely, that all through my life I may think about it and be glad for it.

Yes, he is come. There was another note, the handwriting not so strange to me now, on Saturday morning, to say that he should try to get by the evening train; but if not, it would be midnight before he could arrive. Papa said he would be sure to come by half-past six, for he disliked so being out late at night. I remembered that, and smiled to think of what it brought back. So all was prepared for him.

How pleasant it was for me to help to get everything ready, I, who dislike housework so, and would not touch a duster, or handle a plate from January to December, if I could help it! What a nice feeling came over me when I went into the “best lodging-room,” as Joan calls it — the green-room, looking out over Braeton Church and village — to see that all was neat and tidy; the table drawn up to the window, with inkstand and writing portfolio upon it; for would he not want to write to his mother after coming so far? and had I not heard him complain of the want of a table in his room at Scarbro’? The Bible and prayer-book, too, laid on his dressing-table, the cushioned chair wheeled to the fire-side, and the hearth swept bright and clean; the lamp trimmed ready for lighting, and the “company slippers,” that I braided last spring for chance visitors, laid for him within the fender. Then — all these matters arranged — to go into the store-room and take out our pet china, and fill the crystal nautilus shell with marmalade, and put the macaroons into the cake basket, Mamma’s wed-

ding present from Sir Everard Albyn, and break the white sparkling sugar, and seek out the softest, daintiest napery from the great chest; and to see all nicely arranged in the dining-room, looking bright, and cosy, and comfortable when he should come. How much pleasanter to do all these things for any one you care for, than to leave them to strangers. I know now why Maud trips about round the house with such gay-hearted gladness to put things straight when Stephen Roden is coming. I saw the table set for tea in the dining-room, and drew the crimson curtains, and made all look warm and homelike, and went upstairs into my own room to wait.

As the hall clock struck six, papa set off to Marbrook to meet the train. I watched the gate swing to after him, and thought that when next he opened it, it would be not alone. Then I made myself look as nice as I could—there is never any harm in doing that;—I put on the dark green cloth dress, with broad velvet trimmings, that I had worn the last day we were at Scarbro', with the same suit of arabesque lace,

and the little Indian coil brooch. And I wished in my heart that he too might have that same loose grey coat and black tie that I had learned to love so well. It is not foolish, I think, this attachment to some sorts of dress. There is a great individuality about things that we have become accustomed to, and I had thought of him in that garb so long, it seemed only natural to wish to see him in it still; and it would make it seem, too, as if other things besides the dress had remained the same. Then I put my light out, and sat down at the window, to watch for them coming home.

It was not long past sunset. The old familiar household sounds were going on below. I could hear Manley rattling plates in the kitchen, and Joan going up and down stairs, putting away the linen that had come from the laundress, and Maud's quick light step pattering across the hall now and then to fetch something in to the dining-room. And Jip, our parrot, was talking to himself in a quiet, congratulatory sort of manner, as his custom was, before he retired to rest for the night. "Pretty boy he was then, pretty boy-y-y,

pretty boo-o-o-y," lingering over the last syllables with an ascending gamut of sound; then as some unusual noise was heard, he would say in an authoritative tone, "Silence there! who's that?" and set off into a long, shrill scold, wound up generally by the same self-complacent affirmation, "Pretty boy he was." By and by all became quieter; one door after another was shut, and not opened again; it grew dark, the parrot said "Good night, Jip," and went to sleep,—at least spoke no more. The bells chimed half-past six, and still I sat and waited. Gradually the twilight fell. First of all, Susan Wright's cottage grew dim, then the Downshire hills darkened until I could scarcely tell them from the dim grey clouds behind. Then the gables of Braeton Hall faded out of sight, and the Lingold woods grew black, and the sky deepened down into a soft, uniform darkness. Then I heard the shrill, sharp whistle of the railway train, quick and angry at first, and afterwards dying off into a 'monotonous sighing sound, followed by the swift rattling and rumbling of the carriages over the Marbrook viaduct.

It was come then; half an hour more and they

would be here. He must have reached the station even now; perhaps Papa and he were just shaking hands, and he would be inquiring after us. I waited; it seemed a long time. Presently I heard the meadow gate swing, and footsteps tramp along;—no, it was only some of the labourers from the hall farm, coming home late, for they passed the garden and went on towards Braeton, and all was still again. Then more footsteps, but they passed too. It was quite dark now, and I could see the lights from the cottage windows flickering out into the gloom. By and by the meadow gate swung again—then the garden gate opened, and footsteps, firm and strong, rung upon the gravel walk. He had come! Yes, for there was his voice, quiet, and steady, and kind, just as it had spoken to me seven weeks ago, not changed in the least; and at the sound of it there came over me a great rest and thankfulness, a feeling as if some heavy strain had been taken off me, as if there was nothing more to wait for, but only the blessed certainty of his presence that filled and quieted everything. Then I heard mamma go into the hall to meet

them, and there were greetings and welcomings. Then a step—his step—came up stairs, and he passed my door to his room. After that the dining-room bell rung, followed by Joan's step going backwards and forwards with the urn and tea-things. A few minutes passed, and he came out of his room, and went down stairs again, and I heard his voice speaking pleasantly and cosily, mingled with papa's and Maud's in the room below.

And still I sat up here in this easy chair, listening to it all with shut eyes, and a dreamy sense of rest and sure enjoyment. I could not go into the room, but I knew he was there, and that was quite enough; it was as much happiness as my heart could hold just then, to sit quietly and listen to his voice, feeling that I was so near him. Once or twice I crept quietly down stairs and listened to the pleasant hum of their talking, and laid my face against his shaggy great coat which was thrown on the hall table, and then back again up here. How strange it is, that trembling shyness with which we hold back from some great delight—that hush, and almost awe, with which we pause



on the threshold of some dear hope before it becomes reality.

Maud came to call me at last, and I went down, trembling as I went, and sheltering myself behind her as I had never done before.

Yes, he was just the same. Not a bit changed in look or expression since that morning I had talked with him for the last time in the room at Scarbro'. The same face that I had seen for so many times in my dreams, the same voice I had listened to again and again, the same warm, thorough hand clasp that I had missed for so long; that same half-veiled stateliness and self-control, all just the same. And taking this in with a single glance, there came over me just the same old feeling of being held in subjection by him, of being in some way cared for by him.

I took my work and sat down in my own corner by papa's chair, thinking of nothing but just how pleasant it was to be with him again; not caring either to speak or be spoken to, but satisfied only to look at him now and then as he sat in the great easy chair opposite, and talked to papa about our seaside reminiscences. I used to feel

so proud before, when strangers came to our house ; I used to like so to take the lead in conversation, and show how bravely level I could stand with the most intellectual and the best informed. Now I only wanted to be silent, and to think — to think.

Once or twice he spoke to me, looking straight into my face, with those great, searching, dark eyes of his, whose like for truth and depth I have never seen before ; but I could not talk. I could only sit still and be happy. And so the evening passed away, until he left us and said good night.

It is eight o'clock now, and we have breakfast at nine. I must make haste and finish this. He and papa are walking in the garden below, and as they turn and pass under my window, I hear his voice.

I woke on Sunday morning with a vague, dreamy sense of something pleasant. I knew not what it was, until the sunlight coming through the curtains on Mr. Lowe's plaid, told me why I was happy. I never knew before what it is to waken up to a sense of joy, to have hope and rest peep under my very eyelids, and open them to fresh

bright light. I always read the Collect and Lessons for the day, before I come down on Sunday morning, for I like to think upon them, and understand them, before I hear them again in church. The one yesterday morning was very calm and beautiful, praying that we might be cleansed from all our sins, and serve God with a quiet mind. And I think I said Amen to it more earnestly than I have ever done before. Some one says that when we are happy we forget God, and rest in our happiness ; but it is not always so.

Mr. Lowe and I walked to church together. Our little church at Braeton, with its square old tower, and mossed battlements, and latticed windows, what a store of memories it holds for me ! I think this is the charm of living very long in a place, that you grow to each other with a quiet, honest friendship. I have never been in any other church but this, except that one at Scarbro'. Every nook and aisle of it is holy ground to me. And the old clergyman, too, greyheaded even when I was a child, but now with locks almost as white as his surplice, how he seems bound up with us all. I remember long ago when I was a very

little girl, I used to sit on the high green-cushioned seat, and stretch my neck to look out of the window at the great yew-tree, or to watch the clouds go careering along over the blue sky, and wish the sermon was over. And I liked to look at those angels' heads on the tops of the pillars, and fancy that one of them was like mamma, and another like Aunt Miriam, who died so long ago. There I used to watch Sir Everard Albyn, and Lady Blanche and her two daughters, who sat in the pew before us, and think how nice it must be to wear such smart bonnets, and have a new frock almost every Sunday, and not be obliged to mend one's gloves when the finger ends got bitten off, as mine so often were. And then when the sermon was half way through, Sir Everard would drop off to sleep, and I often wished I might do so too; but the governess always gave me a little push before I had time to get my eyes fairly shut, and I was obliged to rouse up and sit straight again. It was there too, into that same pew, that we all went in such deep mourning the Sunday after Aunt Miriam had been buried; and I wondered why the organ played nothing but

melancholy chants, and Mr. Eden wore a black scarf over his white robes. And I remember the prayers used to seem so very long, and I couldn't understand what they meant, and why in one place all the ladies curtsied and the gentlemen bowed (I wonder at that sometimes even now); and it used to seem so funny that, when mamma took us to church in the long, bright summer evenings, the clergyman always said something about "lightening our darkness," although the sun was shining in at the window as bright as ever it could be; and after that came something about "perils and dangers of the night," which made me feel very uncomfortable when I had got home and been sent to bed, for fear something should come and fetch me away. I can understand that prayer better now, as I hear it week after week in the evening service; and I have learned to think of it as seeking guidance for us throughout the whole darkness of this mortal life, until the morning comes.

It is wrong to have wandering thoughts in church, so I tried hard to conquer those that came over me yesterday morning, and to hush down

the proud feeling that would rise when I saw him standing in the reading desk, so grave, and earnest, and solemn; reading in his own voice, unchanged from the one which had spoken to me long ago on the rocks at Scarbro', the beautiful service of our Church; and afterwards standing in the pulpit, speaking so bravely, and purely, and nobly for his Master. I tried to forget Philip Lowe, and hear only the messenger, the teacher sent from God; but it was hard work. Every now and then something reminded me of words he had said before, words that had been said to me alone, and no one else, when it seemed to me that he was my teacher, mine only.

Maud and I came out of church by ourselves, leaving papa to wait for Mr. Lowe, and on the way home heard sundry remarks on the minister.

"Staying at the Lodge, I understand," said a low voice just behind me.

"Oh-h-h!" replied a mysterious whisper, which I recognised as belonging to Miss Smart, the Marbrook dressmaker, who is always on the look out for new preachers.

“Not married, did you say? [dear me!” said Miss Farbelook to her sister, just as we turned out of the little gate into the road.

“Very distinguished looking,” responded the sister, rubbing the gilt cross on her prayer-book with her cambric pocket-handkerchief; “never saw a man that suited a surplice so well in my life; belongs to Cambridge too, by his hood.”

“And wore such beautifully fine bands,” resumed the elder spinster.

Oh Braeton! Braeton!

By and by, as we got out of the straight path leading to the church, the people began to disperse along their several roads. Sir Everard and Lady Albyn took their usual short cut through the wood to the Hall; Mrs. Herman Kaye sailed down to Priory Cottage as stiff as crinoline and family pride could make her; the villagers paired off to North or South Braeton, and Maud and I were left to ourselves to cross the three fields which lay between us and the Lodge.

“I like Mr. Lowe, he is very earnest and very good.”

“Yes,” I said, looking hard and fast at the distant hills.

“I could respect him very much; more so, I think, than any one I have ever seen, except ——.”

“Except Stephen Roden?”

“Yes, except Mr. Roden.”

There is nine o’clock striking. I must finish this in the afternoon, whilst papa and Mr. Lowe go for their drive over the Downshire moors.

*Afternoon.* Yesterday at this time.

Maud and I walked with Mr. Lowe to Braeton this morning to see some of the poor people, but yesterday he and I were alone together for three long, bright, golden hours. Maud had gone to the Sunday school, and papa proposed that I should take Mr. Lowe by the private road through the meadows to Lingold, to see the sun set over the lake. He could trust us, he said, not to break the Sabbath by idle talk as we went.

That warm, bright, sunshiny afternoon — shall I ever forget it, — shall I ever say again as I said then, “I am happy now?” I shall, I know I shall. The rest-day has come, my Sunday so long



looked for; the brightener and hallower of all my life.

We went through the orchard where Pet and Muffie were grazing. They came up and rubbed against him, as if they knew he would be kind to them; our little terrier does so too, and even Jip sets up a complacent chuckle and holds down his head to be patted when he hears Mr. Lowe's voice. Then we crossed the meadow and over the stile into Lingold wood. It was so hushed, and calm, and still in that bright October sunshine. Not a sound to be heard but the flickering of a sere yellow leaf here and there, and the rustle of a squirrel darting up into the trees. Even our footsteps were buried in thick moss and bracken leaves, and there was not so much as the sighing of the wind among the branches to break the stillness; for the air was motionless, and there seemed to be upon everything that lushed, waiting, suspended feel that I have often noticed in this wood, as though something were speaking that our dull human ears could not catch. And to listen to it, all Nature had stilled her busy working.

Papa said he could trust us not to waste our time in idle talk. I thought at first we were not to use it in any sort of talk at all. Mr. Lowe was so very quiet; he was in one of those thoughtful moods that often come over him, and he walked along beside me as if in a sort of dream, looking out and away through the lacing branches with that vague, half-veiled sort of look I had learned to know so well. At last he said:—

“This country home of yours is very peaceful, Miss Harcourt; it seems as if it were always Sunday here.”

And so it would be, if only he were here. Always Sunday, always rest-day. I said we had learned to love Braeton very much, and I hoped we should never leave it. N.B. I would not have said so much of the place six months ago.

“Never?” he answered, turning round to me with a half smile, and that questioning look which comes now and then into his face.

“Never is a very long word,” I said, “but it would grieve us very much to leave Braeton;” and then I stooped down to pick some gorgeous tinted sycamore leaves. I could say no more, for

his look had called up such a whirl of strange, restless thoughts. Then the conversation dropped, and we walked on, silent as before, through the golden autumn wood, and on to the little bridge that crosses the Mar-brook. Here we rested. Mr. Lowe leaned his arms on the low rail, and I stood beside him. Just where I would always wish to stand. Let me think over that scene again, as it appeared to me whilst we two stood watching it yesterday afternoon at this time. There was not a cloud in the sky, neither in that sky which bent broad and loving over us, nor — for me at least — in that one which we look to with other eyes than those of sense. Without, all was pure and bright, Nature's Sabbath and mine too. Before us was the Lingold lake, one unbroken silver sheet, fringed round with many-tinted October trees, behind which rose the purple ranges of the Downshire hills, all bright and glowing with the afternoon sunshine, and mellowed by that soft, delicious effect of atmosphere which lies so beautifully on everything in early autumn. Behind us the Mar-brook flickered in and out among the low bushes, catching the sunlight now and

then like a glancing network of gold, and swaying the long tufts of weed with a lazy, wave-like motion. And all was so still, so very still. It seemed as if Nature were pausing for reverent attention, ere with folded hands and closing eyes she repeated her evening prayer. I fancied now and then that I could hear the sound of bells chiming from some of the distant villages; but it might be only fancy. I often think now that I hear bells chiming as if for prayer. Mr. Lowe was still leaning over the rail, looking down into the little shadowed pool where the brook widened out into the lake, and watching the leaves, yellow and brown, and purple, and olive, and warm crimson, which fell from the overhanging trees, and floated along with the current. Just so utterly alone were we two months ago, while the waves crooned and eddied round us, and the great plumy fronds of sea-weed swayed at our feet. I could but go back with memory to that long-ago morning, and think of all we had said then. He had been thinking of it too, for after awhile he said, half to himself — “Those were very pleasant

days," and then, with a recollecting smile, he added,—

"Those I mean at Scarbro', on the old Castle rock and the North cliff. After all, there is much left to be thankful for. Life is not so dark as our ungracious hearts would make it. You have found it so, have you not, for your face is brighter now than it was then, and there is a spring and freshness in your voice that I don't remember before?"

He had thought of me then, sometimes.

"I was sorry to go away so suddenly, without being able to say good-bye to you; but I felt quite sure we should meet again, and say all that we left unsaid then."

There was that same undertone in his voice in these last words, as though they meant more, a great deal, than they spoke. Then he went on —

"It has done you good, then, that time at Scarbro'?"

It had, how much good! But I could not tell him all that, so I put away the rushing thoughts

that came back upon me, and said as quietly as I could —

“Yes, I believe I learned to think more truly of human nature, to think more charitably of others, and more justly of myself.”

“Do you know,” he said, still watching the leaves drift idly by, with a pleasant warm smile over his face, which softened down its proud stately curves, “I fancy you thought no small things of yourself when you first went to Scarbro’. You looked like a person who has had a very limited range of observation, and has stood for the most part above her companions in mind and soul; but when you got there, you found there were more things in heaven and earth than you dreamed of in your philosophy; was it not so?”

I could only tell him, smiling within myself as the old feeling of tractableness came over me again; — it always did in his presence; — that he was quite right.

“I saw there was great honesty and power in the heart of you, only you had not learned to use it, and so it teased, and worried, and

fretted you, instead of leading you out to make something worthy of your life. You have learned to use it better now."

"It was very kind of you," I said, "to take to me as you did. Nobody ever took the trouble to tell me of my faults before, and so I came to the conclusion that I hadn't any to be told of."

He looked at me with a strange look, half quizzical, half serious.

"And so you are very much obliged to me?"

"Yes, very."

"Were you glad when you knew I was coming to see you again?"

"Yes, somehow I knew you would come. I always thought so, but not quite so soon; it was such a lucky chance that Mr. Eden ——"

"Mabel."

"Well, what must I say — providential arrangement then — that you should be sent for, and Papa was so glad that his friendship with you should be renewed."

"I did not come to see your Papa, I wanted to know how you were getting on. I wanted to

see you again, and to hear you say that you had begun to use life as God intended you should use it. I always feel grieved when I see good material wasted, as you were wasting what had been given to you ; for you know I have a touch of economy in me, and am sparing of most things."

"Except fault finding," I suggested.

"Well, we won't say any more about that ; it seems it has not been without some sort of useful end. It is rather refreshing sometimes to be told that one is not absolutely perfect."

And then, for we seemed to come very near together that afternoon, I ventured to tell him of many things that had perplexed me since he first taught me to look at my own life as a thing given me for use, and not solely for enjoyment. I suppose all people have these doubts and stumblings before they get on to firm ground ; doubts that I had never spoken about even to Maud, for she was so simple and trusting that I could not find it in my heart to mar her peace by telling her how rough for me the journey sometimes was, which she found so



smooth. And then he told me of his own early life, of long, weary searching after the right way, of disappointment and hope deferred; of hard hand-to-hand conflicts with error, of many scars got in soul-fighting, until at last, the storm and tumult past, he had learned to rest in a wisdom purer than his own; the same rest I was seeking after. And it seemed to me then that I could understand why his face had fixed itself into that mould of high resolve and self-control, and how those lines so strong of thought and suffering had come there.

Still, as we spoke in this way, the leaves came drifting, drifting on; the yellow leaves falling silently from the thinning branches, that would so soon be quite bare, and floating away beneath us into the Mar-brook, where they were lost among the fern and copse wood. And I stood there, watching them, thinking all the while of nothing but how pleasant it was that Mr. Lowe, Philip Lowe, should have been caring for me all this time, praying for me too.

“You will think of this quiet Sunday afternoon when I am gone, Mabel? I shall be glad to know

that you remember me sometimes." And so saying, for it was falling late now, he took my arm in his, and, often turning to look back at the little bridge and the purpling lake and the distant hills, we came home once more through the wood, hardly speaking a word, for Mr. Lowe had gone into one of his quiet moods again; and as for me, to be walking side by side with him was contentment enough. Only as we passed under the great mountain ash, just at the entrance of the wood, I asked him to gather me a spray of its bright crimson leaves which grew above my reach, and I have pressed it here in my desk as a mark of my first rest day.

And then to church again in the evening, to hear him preach the third homily to me, the second to every one else. Never, until last night, have I said Amen so heartily to that general Thanksgiving, in which we bless God for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life. And there, kneeling in that quiet old Braeton church, I prayed, for the first time in my life, for all those to whom this great, this precious gift

of human love had been given; that for them, as for me, it might be made the brightener, the purifier of their life; the prelude to that other and Divine love of which it is the type. For Maud, too, kneeling beside me — my quiet-hearted sister Maud,— and for Stephen Roden; and thus thinking of them and praying for them, I missed the other words of the service, and heard Mr. Lowe's voice no more until I woke up to it again in these words—

“In this world, knowledge of Thy truth, and in the world to come, life everlasting.”

And I thought that, perhaps, Philip Lowe had been thinking of me when he prayed them.

This morning we three went into the village again to see some of the old people. Matthew Benn was standing at his door, so we went in and had a chat with him. Polly was half beside herself with proud astonishment at a visit from “t' quality preacher,” and vented her excited feelings in a rapid series of spasmodic curtseys, which very much tried our powers of gravity. Next we went to Lizzy Machin's, and then to the gamekeeper's. Poor Mary seems very near death. The doctor

has told her she cannot live many days. She thanked me for the flowers I had sent her last week ; she had them, all fresh and sweet yet, in the little white mug by her bedside. Mr. Lowe read to her that chapter in the Revelation about heaven, and I wondered how it felt to be so near it—to have only a few days left of earth and all that earth can give. It seemed to me I could not like to die so soon. Mr. Lowe had been looking at the flowers, for when we came out he said—“ You are learning, then, to think for others ; it is a sweet employment, is it not ? ”

I told him he must not give me credit for too much benevolence. I had sent them mostly as a little sort of thank-offering because we were going to see him again. I thought instantly I had said too much, and wished the words back, but only until I had glanced up to his face, and seen the quick, sudden, warm smile that had come there. I knew then that I had not done wrong.

The sun is going down over Lingold ; they will be home very soon now. Then there will be tea, and the cosy gathering round the fire, and pleasant talk in the twilight. How many things we can

speak about in the twilight, that would be hidden away if the sun were shining. I have been writing here for more than three hours. How quickly the time goes when we are thinking of what has made us so happy; and yet the half of it has not been told. Ah, well, I can remember it!

I hear the wheels, they are coming; and then in the evening Maud and I will sing. I want to find out if he likes music. We will have some of those grand sweeping sonatas of Beethoven's, and Mendelssohn's "*Lieder ohne Worte*." I am happy. I am very happy. I am glad that I live.

Mrs. Herman Kaye sent me a ticket this morning for the operatic concert on Tuesday evening. I will go. Also a message that she would call with the carriage for me at half-past seven. I don't know what Mr. Lowe thinks about this sort of thing. I know he never used to go to the promenade concerts at Scarbro'; but I think for once in a while I shall use my own judgment. Besides, Clarelli is going to sing the song of Beatrice. I must hear it, I will hear it. It will make me think of Mrs. Tresilis again. I have wanted to hear that song so.

Yes, I will go. If Mr. Lowe seemed not to like it, why, perhaps — but no, he does not know the life that music is to me; and I don't think I could make him understand it. Yes, I will write to thank Mrs. Herman Kaye, and tell her I will be ready to-morrow evening.

And now, Mabel, quick, and pack up your desk.

## CHAPTER VII.

MRS. MARTHA BRANT, widow of Timothy Brant, late farmer of Mossingay Hollow, and house-keeper to Mr. Roden of the Cottage, always had a few friends to tea once a year. She preferred the month of October, as being for the most part a slack time in the country, when harvest was nicely over, and the wheat was off people's minds, and Milly Dakin, the blacksmith's wife, was at liberty from going to Mrs. Farmer Smith's to help with the housework while the servants were out in the fields; and Polly Benn, another of her intimate friends, and laundress to Mrs. Herman Kaye, had a little bit more time on her hands, now that winter was coming, and Mrs. Kaye had given over wearing such lots of muslin dresses and worked petticoats. She didn't care, didn't

Mrs. Brant, for having folks come to see her at all, unless they could come with an easy mind and a good appetite; and how could they do that when they had a lot of starch things rolled up behind the mangle at home, that they were forced to iron out that same night; or when they had been run off their feet all day with odd jobs, and had a load of housework on their minds, and hadn't hardly time to tidy themselves up and to get to the cottage by four o'clock, which was Mrs. Brant's tea hour.

So having ascertained, by divers and sundry means, that the guests she wished to invite would be at liberty,—for Mrs. Brant had not yet reached that acme of polite refinement which leads her betters to ask their friends on a particular day, because they know they can't come,—she knocked at the office door one evening, after Mr. Roden had returned from his daily rounds; and when she had performed the usual curtsy, and smoothed down her white apron—which her master had learned to understand as the invariable prelude to a little private conversation—she intimated to him her desire to dispense her



yearly rites of hospitality; informing him of the number of guests she wished to invite, and receiving permission to avail herself of the contents of the store-room and larder to any extent she might think proper. Having got this little preliminary ceremony safely through, she returned to the kitchen to give Sally directions about washing up the tea things, and setting them carefully away, ready for the great occasion. Then she attired herself in her best print gown, a stone-coloured ground with a nice lively pattern of red and green leaves upon it, her Sunday bonnet, and the new shawl which master had given her last spring, and set off down the village to disperse her invitations.

Milly Dakin would be very glad to come. It would be two years next Christmas charring time since *she* was anywhere out to tea, and she thought it was time she gave herself a little bit of a holiday. She would send down the very next morning by the carrier for a new cap from Marbrook, and as good luck would have it, she'd got a clean print gown that she hadn't had a chance to put on this six weeks past, because

there had been so many wet Sundays, except last one, and then she was kept in from church because the woman hadn't sent her bonnet home from trimming; so that Mrs. Brant couldn't have asked her at a more convenient time, and she should be fine and pleased to come, if only Mrs. Brant would excuse her bringing her husband's coat to mend, for really, with two or three children trailing round one's heels all day, one never got a chance to put a stitch in till night, and there'd been a hole in one of the pockets this last fortnight, big enough to let a penny through. So that was settled.

Susan and Dorothy Glen, the two old spinster women who had been three and forty years in the service of the late Duke of Chartermayne, and were now pensioned off in a comfortable little thatched cottage at the turning down of Mossingay Lane, would be very glad to come too. There was nothing they enjoyed so much as a cup of Mr. Roden's tea, for Mrs. Brant always made it so good; and then they got to hear nicely how things were going on in the village; and if they were both of them a little bit hard

of hearing, they hoped Mrs. Brant would excuse it, and ask her friends to speak a trifle *up* when anything tasty was going to be said. And if she would be kind enough not to put any *green* tea in the pot, for somehow or other they couldn't sup green tea, it gave them a kind of colic feel, and they knew Mrs. Brant wouldn't mind their just mentioning it in a friendly way. There was only Mrs. Benn to be asked now. Four would be quite plenty, and Martha didn't like having a lot of folks, it made her feel kind of nervous like, and frightened there wouldn't be enough to eat.

Polly Benn would come, that she would, hard enough. *She* didn't often get a bit of pleasure, goodness knew; what with washing, and wringing, and mangling, and ironing, and giving an eye to the old man, and keeping him clear of colds, and seeing that he didn't get anything as disagreed with him, she never seemed to have a minute's rest. She was sure *she* didn't know what possessed people ever to go and get married at all, if they couldn't find anybody better nor she had done—good for nothing but to be

coddled up and kept out of harm's way, and no sort of hand at helping to addle a living. Catch *her* tying herself up with anybody else if she ever got her freedom again. Yes, she was sure it was very kind of Mrs. Brant to think of her, and she would put her best foot forward next Tuesday, and get all the washing sent to the right-about before dinner, so that she might have nothing on her mind, but just to get herself dressed. Only if Mrs. Brant wouldn't mind about letting her bring the old man, too; he got kind o' dazed like when she wasn't there to keep an eye upon him, and she'd take care he wasn't in anybody's way, for she'd just fix him up in the corner, and he'd be as still as a baby if nobody spoke to him. She shouldn't like to have it on her conscience that he'd been sitting in a draught whilst she wasn't there to look after him, to say nothing of the trouble of nursing him up if anything happened. So it was arranged that Matthew was to come too.

This was on Saturday evening, while Mabel Harcourt sat within her curtained window, watching the grey twilight come up, and listening as

she had never listened before for the tread of footsteps on the gravel walk. It would be too much to affirm, perhaps, that next morning Mrs. Brant's thoughts were entirely, or even to an average extent, absorbed in the solemnities of the service, or that, mingling with the clear, exact, black type of her prayer-book, and peeping in and out through the quaint old carving of the pulpit, and floating in savoury procession up the shadowy aisles, there did not come visions of other and more sublunary realities—new theories of development in the gastronomic line, striking novelties in oblong, square, and oval cheesecakes, possible feats of skill in biscuits and open tarts; sponge-cakes risen exactly equal all round, such as even Dorothy Glen in all her decades of ducal servitude had never excelled; seed loaves that would make Milly Dakin's lips water, so brown, and tempting, and light did they appear as she thought of them during the reading of the second lesson. By and by, when the Litany was through, and the sermon fairly begun, temptation took a stronger hold upon her. During the announcement of the text and the heads of the discourse,

she went mentally through the manufacture of a baking of roll gingerbread, and beheld it in her mind's eye ranged in all its luscious buttery sweetness on the ledge at the top of the pew. Little by little the tide of material things rolled in upon her soul; once more she was standing before her cooking-table, paste-pin in hand, with the tin cutters ranged in order around her, and jam pots waiting to be rifled of their savoury contents. Softly and strangely upon the pleasant inner world of tarts and cheesecakes in which her fancy expatiated, there fell at times from a deep voice in the pulpit a crystal drop out of another sphere, a whisper of "eternal joy,"—"rest in heaven,"—"hope that maketh not ashamed,"—"the land that is very far off,"—but it became gradually easier and easier to wipe these falling drops away, until at last they ceased to come at all, and she dozed off into a pleasant dream, wherein she stood beneath a lofty dome of spongecake, with peaks and minarets shooting upward, and columns of roll gingerbread rising and clustering into arches of fantastic form; and beneath her feet, crossed at regular intervals,

and studded with many-coloured comfits, was a tessellated pavement of Scotch bread, with a gentle tender brown upon it as though just from the oven, while everywhere there arose from censers of delicate fancy-work open tarts the sweetest perfumes, such as in waking hours had been wafted to her from the open portals of Lord Chartermayne's kitchens. Pleasant dream! which melted not away until the solemn tones of the organ voluntary, and the rustling sound of many footsteps, announced that another sabbath morning with its privileges was over.

Chide her not, or softly let the censure fall, as she dreams there in that old high-backed pew, her bonnet strings rising and falling in measured movement to the gentle heaving of her matron bosom, and her capacious hands giving from time to time a vague outreaching jerk as though in quest of some imaginary rolling-pin or paste-cutter. She is not the only one who dreams in Braeton church that sunshiny Sunday morning, though Mabel's are waking visions.

"Now, then, friends, *do* be as kind as help yourselves," said Mrs. Brant on Tuesday after-

noon, when the dreams of Sunday had solidified into a sober certainty of waking bliss, and the deal table in the kitchen of Mossingay Cottage was covered with an array of comestibles, and surrounded by a circle of comely, cheerful faces—faces such as might have put the sourest old bachelor extant into a good temper to behold; “there’s plenty of everything, only *do* reach to, and make yourselves at home.”

And indeed there was plenty of everything. Mrs. Brant had no notion of inviting her friends to tea, and then not giving them enough to eat. The contents of that table were the results of a day and a half’s unremitting toil on the part of herself and Sally, and she intended them to be finished before the evening was over. A dotted line of hot buttered tea cakes formed the outwork of the ground plan, with a towering fort of seed loaf at each corner. A citadel of sponge cake occupied the centre, approached by lines of open tarts and biscuits, and commanding an elevated view of the whole field. This cake was made from a design which had suggested itself to Mrs. Brant during the



singing of the Psalm at Braeton Church the Sunday before; it gave one something the idea of a pulpit, being panelled all round, and having little top knots of fancy work, and a hollow place in the middle, just handy for a clergyman to stand in, as Dorothy Glen said, and then added that it was a shame such a good, beautiful thing should ever be cut up to go down people's throats: leaving some of her hearers in doubt whether it was the sponge cake or the clergyman she referred to in this last proposition.

After the first cup of tea was put round, and the sugar and cream briskly circulated, the tide of talk began to run clear; eddying first of all over the strange clergyman who had preached the Sunday before. Old Matthew Benn had been deposited by his wife, according to agreement, in an arm-chair by the fireplace out of harm's way; and she kept a benevolent look out over him in a general way, getting up in the intervals of conversation to supply him with a fresh piece of cake, and to give him a drink of tea.

“Sich an airnest, gude man;” said Dorothy Glen, “I never missed a word he said, for all I’s e so hard o’ hearing. I’d go twice as far ony day to set eyes on the like of him agin. I’s e very partial to an airnest minister.”

“Ay, marry,” said Milly Dakin, who had got the new cap from Marbrook and the clean print gown on, “an’ so plain, too; wha would ha’ thought sich a quality man as him wad ha’ made us poor ‘unlarned folks understand ought?”

“For my part, Mrs. Dakin, I likes a few o’ hard words. What’s use o’ goin’ to church if you don’t hear no different to what commonality talks? I like summut as flits aboon me, don’t you, Mrs. Brant?”

“Why, Mrs. Benn, I can’t say as it makes much odds to me. I thought yon man had a good voice what I heard on’t; but I allus goes expectin’ it’s to be all right, an’ I nivver thinks o’ findin’ no fault.”

“To my mind, he tongued them prayers beautiful,” said Milly; “why, they was every bit as good as new ‘uns. ‘ I knowed he was summut

out o' t' common from t' first. I took tent on him when he stood up for to read, and says I to my master, 'Martin,' says I, 'he's a right 'un is yon.' He'd do us a sight o' good, nob-but we got him fixed down in these parts; for to my mind we've wanted a stirrin' up this good bit past. We're gettin' kind o' sleepy like."

"Them's my sentiments, exact, Mrs. Dakin;" said Polly, "we've had that there Mr. Eden such a while, everybody's got to know his sermons by heart. When he's gotten fairly set off, an' t' tex' gived out, I jest know what's comin', so I mostly goes to sleep. Best sermon I ever gets is when Miss Maud comes to see me of an afternoon, an' reads a bit to me; bless her sweet face, I'd tak' anything out of her lips as she chose to tell me. Somehow nor other she makes me feel how awful bad I is, which is a sight more'n most folks can. An' then she has sich a pleasant like way wi' her; her religion shines straight out through her face, so as everybody knows it's there, and it kind o' mak's her look so happy. I can't abear folks

as allus sets on a sighin' an' groanin' when they start talkin' about religion, an' castin' up whites o' their eyes, an' givin' sort o' shakes wi' their heads, as if summut awful was a' goin' to be said. What I can spell out o' my Bible tells me as how we'd ought to rejoice evermore, an' I'se sure I don't want nothin' to do wi' nowt as mak's folks set on whinin' and sighin'. I gets plenty o' that at home, goodness knows; what wi' my ould man yonder, when he gets into low spirits wi' rheumatiz, an' me when I gets pain in t' small o' my back wi' standin' so long over t' washin'—I'se done a vast o' sighin' in *my* life one way nor another, an' I don't want no more to start it on again."

"I sure I don't know," twittered out old Matthew from his arm chair by the fire, "it's nowt but a vale o' tears isn't this here, what wi' rheumatiz, and ither folks speakin' cross to ye."

"You just shut up there, Matthy," said his wife, jumping up and settling the old man down with a golden slice of cake from the very centre of the pulpit citadel. "You just shut up. I reckon I brought you along here to be out o'

t' way, an' not for to be puttin' in yer word among things as doesn't consarn you, to say nowt o' talkin' at me for speakin' cross at ye, just as if you wouldn't provoke Job hisself to speak cross at ye wi' yer maunderin's."

Matthew, thus abruptly silenced, fell to upon the sponge cake, and ventured into the conversation no more.

"I was agoin' to say," continued Polly, "if he hadn't ha' broken in an' putten me out, as how Miss Maud had sich a bonnie way o' talkin' about these here things, an' she kind o' makes me feel whiles as if I wanted a change o' heart, an' that's a vast more nor ever yon Miss Tim did, wi' all her sighin' and groanin' an' tellin' of me, to controul my temper an' live a sober an' godly life; just think o' them words to me who was never the worse for a drop in my life; an' then comin' round at me so fierce about bein' a sinner, though for the matter o' that, I don't reckon that I'se so much worse nor a good many folks as goes to church reg'lar and thinks theirselves first rate. I know I gets into my bits o' temper whiles, and kind o' frightens this ould man here and puts

him out o' t' way, but I mostly gets into t' right track agin afore long, and as I says to him, it ain't much when one comes to think about it. My pipe allus goes wi' a blatter, when I *does* set on, but it's over directly, an' things comes round straight. But really Miss Maud kind o' makes everything look so different, an' has a sweet like way o' sayin' things as makes 'em go straight to yer heart afore ye know it."

"Marry then, but she's a vast better nor yon other sister of hers, if she's found t' way to anybody's heart," said the junior spinster Glen, who had hitherto abstained from joining in the conversation, and confined herself chiefly to scientific attacks upon the edible outworks, then forward to the lines of circumvallation, and had now advanced to the citadel itself, and taken captive one of its most elaborately carved panels. "To my mind, if one may say what they thinks now-a-days, yon Miss Harcourt's as stiff a piece as ever I set eyes on."

"Stiff! law now, I should just think it," resumed Polly, "why, she might ha' drunk up all my starch an' not been so stiff after it. I declare

it used to make me feel kind o' freezed like to give a look at her in church, wi' her white, proud face, just for all t' world as if it were cut out on a block o' marble, an' her long straight nose, an' her lips so steady and fixed up like, an' her eyes as black an' shinin', and her head set up wi' sich an air as if t' world wasn't good enough to make a place for it; an' if she meets t' like o' us in t' street whiles, she houlds up her dress, and gives a grand sweep out o' t' way as if we warn't fit to touch. I put her a stone in t' other pocket this mornin' though, and teachd her as how everything wasn't a goin' to be shaped out and pinched in for her pleasure."

"Law! Mrs. Benn," said Milly Dakin, "but I nivver heerd tell of onybody whar dare go agin Miss Harcourt. She'll make you feel it some o' these days. What was it?"

"Why, she sent down her maid to me wi' a lot o' beautiful fine white lace to get up ready agin night, for there's goin' to be a grand convarsin' at Marbrook to-night; a lot o' musicianers, an' players an' things; they generally gets summut o' that sort at t' races, an' she's

mighty fond of a bit o' gaiety is Miss Harcourt. An' this here lace were to be done ready. Mrs. Harcourt's got some o' the most beautifullest lace as ever I set eyes on, just for all t' world like a web o' moonshine, an' she's awfu' partic'lar about gettin' up on it, an' won't let nobody touch it but me if she can help it. An' really it makes one feel kind o' genteel, nobbut to look at it, and I allus takes a sort o' pride in makin' of it look well; but when yon maid brought it this mornin', wi' orders from her young leddy — that was t' word, *orders* — to git it done agin to-night, I just turns me round from t' wash-tub, an' says she might take it somewhere else an' get it done, for I was goin' to try a bit o' pleasure on my own account this time, and wòuldn't put myself out o' t' way to git up white lace for the Virgin Mary herself, if she was to ask me to, let alone a stiff piece like Miss Harcourt, as thinks poor folks was made for nothin' but to serve her turns."

"Well, I can't say but what she got right done to; I mind of her stickin' up her nose once at our Willy, 'cause he ran agin her wi' his greasy pina-



fore, an' I've felt kind o' bitter at her ever since. But they say she isn't so bad this three months past. I heerd tell of her bein' at Lizzy Machin's, readin' to her, nobbut last Wednesday, and, sa s I, she's took a turn you may depend, or you wouldn't catch her on that track. An' my husband tell'd me he was shoein' a horse yesterday, and see'd her go past with Miss Maud an' yon strange clergyman to t' gamekeeper's cottage, where that girl o' theirs lays a dyin', an' he said she looked kind o' sweet like, an' had a sort o' smile on her face as minded him of her aunt Miss Miriam, her as was took off wi' a 'sumption you know, nigh twenty years past."

"There'll never a smile on her face tak' root to do no good," said Polly Benn, "she's had t' pride there over long. Folks gets to *look* like what they *thinks*, an' she's froze herself so long while she'll never come soft agin now, take my word on it. They tell'd me, Mrs. Brant, as how Mr. Roden is lookin' sweet on Miss Maud."

"I don't go to consarn myself wi' them things," responded Mrs. Brant, with a perceptible accession of dignity, which she always assumed

when mention was made of her master and his affairs; "folks in villages is allus talkin', and I've larned better nor to tak' heed of onythings I hears in sich'en a place as this. Least said's soonest mended, that's my practice. Master's been set down to marry everybody that's likely, fra' here to Marbrook, an' there's a vast o' young leddies in these parts as seems to think they've nowt to do but put themselves in t' way of onybody as wears a coat. Things is changed sin' I was a girl, and folks knew what was proper. Of course I feels a nat'ral interest in Master, havin' knowed him man an' boy this five and thirty year, an' I won't say but what I should like to see him fairly settled wi' somebody of his own to look after him. Not as I ain't done *my* duty by him; them last shirts of his'n laid as weighty on my conscience when t' collars didn't fit, as if I'd done 'em for a prince; but folks, specially men, ought to be settled wi' some one o' their own to look after 'em. Women can get along wi' theirselves, *men can't*; they're t' helplessesest things as ever came into this world, wi'out they've a woman to be runnin' round after 'em and settin'

'em straight whiles, an' givin' them odd turns times about, an' keepin' an eye to 'em in a general way. It strikes me as how it isn't unlikely but what Miss Maud 'll be t' one for Master; she's never made up to him like t' rest o' t' young leddies hereabouts, but keeps in t' background an' let's things alone. An' Master likes to ha' somebody about him as is quiet, and minds him of his mother, bless her, as died when he were a little lad. An' there's never a body hereabouts comes any way nigh *her*, the darlin', let alone Miss Maud. But it ain't no consarn o' mine to be pickin' an' choosin' for him; I just lets things go along, and keeps an eye on 'em without saying nothin'. It'll be time enough to let on about it when he starts tellin' me to do a double lot o' preserves; *that's* a sure sign o' summut, an' I shall think things is comin' to a head then. And now, friends, we'll side tea things an' have a bit o' talk round t' fire."

## CHAPTER VIII.

It was broad, busy daylight, when Mrs. Brant and her friends sat down to tea; the shadows of evening were falling so rapidly ere they rose to have their bit of talk round the fireside, that Matthew in his arm-chair in the corner had dwindled both out of sight and out of mind, and the dish-covers, fresh brightened for the occasion, which were hung up over the dresser, gleamed out with a ghostly sort of shimmer from the stone-coloured wall. For the kitchen at Mossingay Cottage was built to the back, and the yard that the window looked into was planted round with chestnut-trees which shut the sunlight out very early in the afternoon; so that, in a general way, Mrs. Brant was obliged to have candles lighted in her dominions nearly

an hour before Mr. Roden rung for them in his front part of the house.

On the whole it had been a very satisfactory tea. It was true Milly Dakin had felt a toothache come on at her fourth cup, and declared that she shouldn't be able to eat another morsel; but a teaspoonful of brandy had quite taken it away, and she was able to set to again as freshly as ever, indeed, Mrs. Brant thought, if anything, a little more so; and Polly Benn affirmed that for her part, she'd never had such a fine time in all her life, the cheesecakes were fit for a born prince, so beautifully crimped in and out, and filled so full that really it gave one an appetite to look at them, and she didn't mind how soon Mrs. Brant asked her to tea again. Susan and Dorothy Glen never said much, but they'd each of them had two pieces of sponge-cake, and three open tarts, besides small things, so it was quite certain their tea had been agreeable, if they hadn't been able to catch everything that was said. And as for herself, she hadn't had a party this good many years past when everything seemed to go on

so nicely, and the cakes turned out so light, and the tea mashed so strong. She usually felt these things on her mind a good deal, and was rather glad when they got over, but really on the present occasion she must say it seemed quite a cross to have to return thanks and clear the table. So that, on the whole, as Mrs. Brant got the candles lighted and settled herself down with her knitting in the midst of her friends, she felt like a person who has done a good thing, and done it very well too, and has every reason to be satisfied with herself for doing it.

Meanwhile, another sort of life — totally another sort — was drifting on at Braeton Lodge, where Mabel Harcourt sat before her mirror, folding her long braids of dark hair, and fastening the wreath of crimson tinted leaves over her grand white forehead, ready for the full dress opportunity in the Marbrook Concert Hall that night. Very queenly she looked as she swept down stairs in her snowy costume, and entered Mrs. Herman Kaye's carriage, which was waiting for her at the door; and very regal

the bend of her stately head as she acknowledged Mr. Euston's elegant flatteries and polite compliments. Of all the thoughts, wild and stormy, which whirled through the heart of her, sealing her eyes upon her home as it gradually distanced through the trees, and making her long, when it was too late, to be back there once more and quiet with him, we cannot speak now; she may tell us of them herself by and by when the end comes, and all she has to do is to sit still and remember it.

Mr. Lowe was in the hall as she passed. He watched her into the carriage and stood in the doorway until the last lingering sound of its wheels had died away. Then, after walking thoughtfully up and down the garden a few times, he returned to the house, went to his own room and began to pack his little valise. There was a train started very early to the North in the morning, and the sooner he was away the better now.

All had not been said that he meant to say during that visit to Braeton, perhaps it never would be. But it was better so, very much

better so; better that she should not know what brought him there, not how nearly, but for that one little wilful act of hers, the threads of their two lives might have come together. After all was done, he threw his plaid over his shoulders—the plaid with the broad brown stripes,—it had been taken care of for him by some one, he knew not who, since that morning he left it behind at Scarbro',—and sat down at the window to think, looking out into the darkness just as Mabel had done four days ago; only that she was waiting for the coming of her hope, and he was listening to the departing footsteps of his.

Mr. Lowe was not a man to waver over anything. The lines of his face grew very firm and steady, the half yearning expression that had once been there melted off, and all grew stern, and fixed, and rigid, as of one who has just laid away from him some great dream of happiness and will look at it no more, lest it should lure him out of the broad beaten track of safety. He stayed there alone until he had well thought into his future, and could see it



clearly mapped out before him, with no blinding lights of hope or fancy upon it,—the time for them was over now,—and then he came down just as calmly, just as quietly as ever, and joined Mrs. Harcourt in the dining-room, where they had appointed to read together.

Just then, beneath the lighted domes and brilliant decorations of the Marbrook Hall, the first gush of music had swept forth, and plumed heads were bent forward in eager listening, and jewelled hands were clasped together for wonder at the singing, and faces long ago toned down into the expressionless hush of aristocratic repose grew keen with excitement, and upon all the gay glitter of the company, and upon Mabel too, sitting there by Mr. Euston Kaye's side, there lay the spell of that one wondrous voice.

And while they were thus dreaming on through the land of music and romance, there eddied and swirled along the quiet little streets of Marbrook—for it was the October race time—a stream of many-coloured, strangely-mingled life. Dark-faced and darker-hearted men, gloating over their ill-gotten gains; loose women

flaunting in gay tinsel dresses through the cold October gloom, and shivering as the wind blew to them round the sharp corners of the lanes and alleys; half-tipsy men, careering down the streets with a rollicking laugh; little ragged children, holding each other's hands, and singing ballads for pence, to take to their drunken mothers at home; groups of idle girls and lads gathering round the doors of the music hall, waiting to see the company come out, pressing forward with eager wonderment as some wandering tide of melody came through the closed doors to hint of the great sea of music within. And there was no need of song, too, even if Clarelli had been silent, for as the door of the great gin-palace in Wide Street swung to and fro on its noiseless hinges, the passer-by might have heard, amidst the rude bursts of revelry and mirth that poured forth, a young, not unmusical voice, singing first one and then another of such popular ditties as the taste of the audience called for; and, looking through the haze of smoke and the fumes of hot spirituous breath which dimmed the gaily-lighted room, he would have seen a

young girl standing there,—more pity for her,—in the midst of the leering, brutalised throng, and bartering, for the scanty pittance which might pay her night's lodging, the tones of a voice which not so long ago had been used to charm away the long bright hours in the home of her innocent youth. Not the first who had stood there with such memories. And so the time wore on, and so the night grew darker, and so the great heart of humanity hoped and suffered, and enjoyed and wearied in the quiet little Abbey town of Marbrook this night of the October races.

Since early afternoon Maud had been sitting by the bedside of Mary Rae. Slowly the tides of life were ebbing out in that darkened room, and the eye glazing, and the face settling down into the calm utter stillness of death—a death from which the sting had been taken away. The long dreary months of waiting were drawing to a close—all the weariness, all the pain. There was nothing left for her now but to die and be done with it. And there sat upon her lips the smile of one for whom earthly hope has quietly

faded out, and no future remains but that of heaven.

Mabel's flowers were there yet, the flowers she had sent not a week ago, carefully treasured in the little white mug by the bedside—rich crimson geraniums, and fuchsias with just one sweet spray of jasmine, the last that had lingered through the early autumn mists, and would not die now until Mary did. But it was too late for her to look at them any more.

Maud had been reading to her from that closing vision of the Revelation. It was the dying girl's chosen chapter, the one she wished to listen to as she passed away, that, having its glorious imagery on her soul, she might go thither to behold the blessed reality; that, still looking on the dream which St. John in his Patmos solitude has pictured, she might wake and find it true.

Very slowly, while Maud waited there, the shadows of evening crept up and up over the Marbrook hills, and dimmed the grey outline of the church, and darkened the great old chestnut-

trees that grew beside it, and put away the soft blue colour from the sky, and the purple haze of autumn from the Braeton trees, until everything was deepened down into the even tint of twilight; just as when Mabel had sat at her window last Saturday evening, waiting for Philip Lowe to come. Mary's mother stood by the bedside, watching the life slowly dying out of her, with a quiet sort of sorrow, not tearful, or passionate, or wailing; because the poor girl had struggled so long with the continual presence of her suffering, that death came to be thought of at last as a friend who should bring the rest that could come no other way. The gamekeeper was out at the lodge in the woods. He had stayed as long as he could, hoping to catch his daughter's last words, and to hold her last look in his memory, but the set time had come, and my lord duke's game must be properly protected, let who would live or die. So there was no one there now but those two watchers, the mother and Maud, who held their breath and spoke no word, as slowly, moment by moment, they heard the angel coming nearer.

“Read it, Miss, again, please,” she said faintly; “I’m thinking of it still all the while, but it makes it clearer when you say it, it’s coming very near.”

Maud read in her own quiet, gentle tones, that seemed to lie so softly upon the great silence and darkness.

“And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, every several gate was of one pearl; and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass. And I saw no temple therein, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And there shall be no night there, and they need no candle, neither light of the sun. For the Lord God giveth them light, and they shall reign for ever and ever. And they shall see His face, and His name shall be in their foreheads.”

“Mary!”

There was no answer. Light had come at last. His name was on her forehead now; she saw His face. Even while Maud read, the Angel had come and taken his own.

Very quietly they kissed the poor, pale,

wasted face that looked so peaceful, so patient. Then they covered it over, and read out the rest of the chapter, not tearfully or with heavy sighs for the life that was gone, but rather giving thanks for the new life that had been gained; and looking bravely upward to the light that still came down from the scarce closed gates of heaven, wherein she had just entered.

And still the lights streamed, and still the jewels sparkled, and white plumes waved, and there was a sheen of satin and scarlet in the Marbrook concert-hall. And still the tide of human hope, and suffering, and unrest flowed onward through the streets. And still the young, once innocent girl sang on in the gin-palace amid oaths, and jests, and ribaldry. And still hollow-voiced and miserable women gathered their finery round them, and shivered in lanes and gusty alleys. And still crested equipages rolled up and down, and Fashion dressed itself in its best, and put on its family diamonds for the annual county ball; and the little beggar girls sang their ballads and thought of their drunken

mothers at home. Just as it always was in Marbrook at the race time.

Maud walked home with Stephen Roden, who was waiting for her at the cottage. As he took her hand and held it under his great strong arm, and as she listened to his voice that had come to be so pleasant to her, and the tramp of his firm, ringing footsteps—and as there came over her that glad, warm sense of protection and safety that she always felt when he was near, she wondered how it would be if she had to die and leave it all. And she asked herself—hard question for any to ask for whom life and love are yet young—whether the glory of that upper world that had seemed to come so near to her a little while ago, were recompense for the great possessions she held on earth. For answer she could only creep closer up to Stephen's side, and steal her hand into his, where it was held very fast, though he never knew why she had put it there.

Ah! much as we talk of heaven, and much as sometimes in our hours of weariness and



disappointment we long for its rest, it is very little to us while yet there is any one on earth for us to shelter by, while yet there is any hand where ours may nestle warm and loving. It needs these to be taken away before heaven becomes very sweet to us; before we care even to look upon its brightness, or to think about it as our home. And so God takes our treasures there; and turning to look after them, and stretching out our hands to reach and hold them back, and gazing with our tearful eyes at that open door through which they have just passed, we begin to see the glory shining through, and heaven becomes real to us — a land not very far off. And then, through our tears, we look for a track whereby we may follow them, and God in His great mercy shows it us. It was just what He wanted us to look for all along, and having come to it, the great lesson of our life is learned. Before another October came round with its early twilight and its soft grey mists, Maud had learned this lesson, and it did not seem so very hard to change earth for heaven. The question which she could not

answer, walking side by side with Stephen Roden, had been asked again, and her whole after life became its response.

It was late, quite dark, when they reached home, and Stephen did not come in. He only stooped down for one good-night kiss from Maud as she stood beside him in the porch, and then released the hand that had lain in his so long, and went back to his lonely office fireside, to think of her still, as he always did when the day's work was done; to fancy her quiet little figure sitting close by him, to look back over all the days since he had known her; to think how little by little she had grown so dear to him, until now he seemed to have no earthly future, no past, no present, but Maud—the child Maud—going about with him everywhere, hallowing all his thoughts, filling his whole life with beauty, and his whole heart with her pure presence. Happy Stephen to be so loved, and so loving; guarded by her gentleness, as she was by his strength!

The household at Braeton Lodge was a very primitive one, being for the most part packed

up and safely lodged for the night by ten o'clock. And as Mr. Lowe was to depart by the first north train in the morning, the usual time of retirement was forestalled. Besides, a great quietness had come over him, and the usual friendly chat by the fireside after tea seemed to drag heavily along, with dreary gaps and breaks of silence, which made them all glad to close it and go to rest. So that long ere the opera at Marbrook was half way through, or the ten o'clock bells chimed from the old Abbey Church, Maud was left alone in the dining-room, to amuse herself there as best she might for two hours until Mabel returned.

There is something eerie rather, in being by oneself in a great house when every one else is asleep, in feeling the utter silence which gradually settles down upon everything. Common sounds, which in the day time pass unheeded, make us start and tremble; even the old accustomed ticking of the clock seems to have a voice in it to which we listen as though it were whispering some strange, mysterious story. The knowledge of suspended life all around us, of

something so near akin to death which has hushed up the busy activities of daylight, brings a certain awe, and makes it easy for us to realise how completely in this world, with all its cares and concernments, we are alone—alone for thought and recollection—alone for the past to come and hold speech with us, opening its treasures again—alone for the future to weave its many-tinted patterns before us,—alone, for our hearts in quiet monotone to speak out all their secrets, and show us what we are. Surely no one who is not thoroughly at rest, who has not an innocent past and a peaceful future, can enjoy such loneliness as this, or stand without fear, face to face with that reserved and other self which comes out and looks at us through the silence.

Maud enjoyed it. Warm and quick beside her, with the very first moment of solitude, came the thought of Stephen Roden, and stayed there all through that two hours waiting time. Surely those who are loved are never quite alone. Always some presence is with them, making the dark places bright: always for that which they

have given away, there is the sense of another life close folded with their own, that will never leave them, that will henceforth be theirs for ever. Maud sitting there, she only waking and conscious, while everywhere around her was silence and sleep, had no fear, no loneliness. She had so much to remember. Whenever the present left her, the happy past or happier future slid into its vacant place, and filled it full with bright, beautiful thoughts. Happy Maud! Yet could she know her happiness, having had no dark cloud of sorrow to show by contrast how clear it was; does not *rest* of any kind imply some struggle gone before; and can they ever rest whose whole bygone life has been one long, quiet dream, from which the waking has not yet come? The alarm, the conflict, the relief,—then, and not till then, the rest. No, Maud was very happy, and she rested in that happiness, but it was not the sort of rest she would know by and by. She had not yet reached the heights or depths of her own nature, to know how much of joy, how much of suffering, it could hold. As yet she stood but on the threshold

of life,—real life,—loving and beloved, it might be, and so able to see farther into it than many a one; but still only a child, not able yet to strike the great chords of human hope or suffering, or listen to their mighty music; but content with playing the simple melodies of gladness, listening to their fairy chime and singing to them as she played. Wait awhile, Maud; it will come to you at last. Struggling, striving, conquering, you will attain to rest. Scaling the grand heights of suffering, you, the child Maud, so innocent and smiling now, will learn to look bravely, steadily round you, seeing more than you dreamed of before. You will learn soon to listen to those great master-chords, which as yet your little fingers cannot strike; and though it may awe you at first, you will afterwards think the music passing sweet. Some play on at simple melodies all their lives; some stand upon the threshold, never crossing it; some walk ever in smooth paths, looking childlike to the grand heights above them, but never knowing the glorious outlook they command. There is work

for you to do, Maud, a better destiny than theirs :  
God will make you perfect through suffering.

The rattle of carriage-wheels swept up the walk, and Mabel, with the light of excitement long ago died out of her dark eyes, and the flush of pleasure from her cheek, stood pale and weary in the room.

“I am so tired, Maud, and so glad it is all over. I only want to rest.”

## CHAPTER IX.

LIE still, tired heart — it is all over now !

You can shut up this book of yours. There is no need to write in it again.

No more sunshine for mental photographs, no more pleasant little wafts of memory to be caught and imprisoned in its leaves ; nothing for you to look out upon now but just a dead, grey, drizzling November mist, like this that is tumbling along over Braeton Plantation, and lying like a crumpled pall upon those heaving Downshire hills. Poor Mabel. Poor old Mabel Harcourt.

And I used to be so proud of this honourableness of mine. I used to think, whatever else I lacked, the clear-cut crystal of truth was always mine. I used to have such a grand contempt for petty



shifts and artifices, and prided myself upon walking bravely and straightforward, with clean, unsmirched feet, over the miserable little deceitful ways of common society. And after all, where has this walking led me to? What sort of a being am I now to sit down and talk to myself on these pages? I could \_cry. No, I couldn't either though, for crying was never much in my line. I could rather lift up a great ringing laugh, more bitter than any tears, and then be quiet all the rest of my life.

I once thought I would never write about it at all, not heap a cairn over this month-old grave, but tread it smoothly down and let the grass grow over it. It may be better though to look at the dead thing once more, and then if I can I will forget it. If I can.

I finished up here last time all in a hurry, full of a pleasant sort of expectancy which I suppose I have said good-bye to for ever and a day. Is it really the same Mabel Harcourt who is writing here now, at this same table, in this same morocco-covered book, with this same tartan-handled pen that Maud gave me? Ah! Maud,

how you love these Scottish tartans—writing, too, the same compact, business-like, somewhat un-womanish sort of hand, as he told me it was, only a few weeks ago, when I was copying out a page of that MS. for Papa in the study. I suppose it is the same, and yet it seems hard as things are now to believe it so.

We did not have any music that evening as I intended. He and Papa got into a long discussion on the mathematical limits of the atmosphere, whether it has any or not; and thence to the A. B. pass examinations at the London University. Papa does so enjoy getting hold of any one who can argue with him on these knotty points, and I am always glad enough to see him drawn out of his silent moods, and really interested in conversation. So I did not venture to disturb them, but just went on with my crayon head of Melancthon, a new study that I have got lately from Marbrook. Only I could not help looking up every now and then from the copy to fancy how like it was to Mr. Lowe. The deep lines of reflection across the forehead, the steady fixedness

of the eye, the strange, kind look shining through all the strength. I did not trouble myself much about the engagement I had made for the next evening, and whether he would like it or not; for when I have once made up my mind on anything I dislike the process of taking it to pieces again. And so the evening passed away.

Next day we all went to the Lingold water-course. A drear, autumnal sort of look it had, with the yellow leaves dropping silently into the water, and the fern fronds curling up brown and ragged upon their long stems. But the rocks were tressed over still with green moss, and the water dripped off with its old pleasant musical plash from the shining lichens. And the black fir trees, thick set upon the hills above, showed out sharp and clear upon the sky; so different their regular, spire-like, architectural outline from the rugged, irregular branches of that great sycamore that stands at the entrance to the path. Just such a difference as there is between Mr. Lowe and Stephen Roden—one so cold and stern, and stately and high; the other,—but I see Stephen Roden often enough, no need to compare

him to anything for the sake of keeping him in remembrance.

Coming home I determined to find out what Mr. Lowe thought about the grand affair of the evening. Somehow I knew that he would not like it before I asked him, still less would he like that I should be there; and it was this feeling of going contrary to him that had as it were built up a sort of invisible barrier between us since the afternoon before, when I had sent the note to Mrs. Herman Kaye. Near as we were together, there was no more pleasant heart to heart talk.

“Mr. Lowe,” I said, as Papa and Maud lingered behind, she used mostly to leave him to me, knowing, I suppose, that I could get on with him the best; not knowing anything else. “Mr. Lowe, if you were not a clergyman, would you go to this opera to-night?”

“No.”

How I had learned to understand the humour Mr. Lowe was in by those curt replies that he gave sometimes. And yet there was something in his look which told me that I might go on.

“Do you think such amusements are wrong in themselves?”

“Wrong in what they lead to, rather than in themselves.”

“But then,” I said, “if any one has the true feeling for music, if it is not just a mere amusement for them, but a life influence, something that brings them new and noble thoughts, may they not give themselves up to it?”

I had been looking away over the crimsoning Braeton woods before, but now I turned towards Mr. Lowe. There was a strange expression upon his face, half self-reproachful, half troubled. Just such as I often see on Miss Nunly's when the race days bring tides of wicked men into Marbrook streets, and wild laughter rings along past the quiet little Abbey Close. Such a look as one might see if some very sad, almost awful, memory were waking up. I don't know what brings that look to Miss Nunly's face, I don't know what brought it to Mr. Lowe's; but for a little while it was the only answer to my question. Then he said quietly —

“Do you think these amusements quite right yourself; quite safe, quite ennobling?”

“I don’t know, I am wavering about it. I should like to think them right if I could.”

“But you can’t exactly?”

“Not exactly.”

He took a little Testament from his pocket, and read me out a single sentence—

“He that doubteth is condemned if he eat.”

“That is my rule of action, Mabel. If you can think, bravely and steadily, that it is right, do it; but if you waver, if you doubt, let this little sentence decide you.”

I wonder where that verse is? I forgot to ask him at the time, and I have hunted up and down the Testament from beginning to end to find it since, but I could never light upon it. What a dull Bible scholar I am. I said, “Thank you; it seems clearer to me now.”

“You see it as I do, then?” and there was a touch of anxiety in his voice.

I said something, I can’t remember what it was now, but it gave him the impression that

I did, for the sad look cleared away from his face, and he began to talk to me in his grave, sweet voice about that other, and purer, and nobler life, whose springs lie far away from any earthly source. He did not feel that cold wall of separation which had grown up between us, how should he? And as for me——

For all this time I had Mrs. Herman Kaye's opera-ticket in my purse. Well, it was the first time I had ever deceived any one, and I did not think it was so very sinful, nor that it would afterwards be so bitter either. So I let him talk on, calling me "Mabel" in his quiet, kind way.

Mr. Lowe is self-opinionated; he is strait-laced; he is rigid, and autocratical almost, in many of his ways of thinking. And yet I might have been guided by him just this once. I might at least have been honest and straightforward. But it is too late now.

I was not afraid that he should find out about my going with Mrs. Herman Kaye. ' Almost as soon as we got home, Maud was sent for to see the gamekeeper's daughter who

was nearly dying. I had not told Mamma about it at all, and as for Papa, he began again, as soon as it got too dusk to read, about atmospheric limits, which would not fix themselves, as far as I could judge. How well Mr. Lowe talked, how clear his ways of thinking, how sharp and well-defined his sentences were; and listening to him, almost the old feeling came over me as when I used to hear him talk at Scarbro'. Only for that something undefined which had grown up between us. It is so pleasant to feel proud of any one you care for, to be quite sure he will always do himself credit, and always win respect.

Mrs. Kaye was to call for me at seven, so before tea was over I slipped away to dress. I like to look well; there is no harm in that; and I spent a long time over the process that night. I put on the white muslin dress with pine-leaf embroidery, which Uncle Philip had sent me from India, with a wreath of crimson-tinted autumn leaves in my hair. After that I folded my opera-cloak round me, and stood before the glass, trying the effect, as the *mo-*



*distes* say, seeing how well the rich folds of the white cashmere contrasted with my dark hair and the brilliant leaves, and wondering what Mr. Lowe would think of me if I were to go and stand before him in my bright array. Soon after seven I heard the carriage drive up to the door, and then, with one more look into the glass, I took up my gloves and the bouquet of geraniums which Euston Kaye had sent me that morning, and swept down stairs.

Sure enough Mr. Lowe *did* see me. He was passing across the hall into the study as I came down. I was not sorry, either, for I knew I made a pretty picture in my white dress and flowing mantle, with the crimson draperies of the staircase window for a back-ground. He stopped short and looked surprised, as well he might, seeing what a butterfly had emerged from that chrysalis of brown French merino, which he had seen an hour ago at the tea-table. I answered his questioning glance very quietly, and with a certain proud pleasure in myself.

“I have an engagement at Mrs. Herman Kaye’s to-night.”

“Ah! I am sorry. And I thought we should have had such a pleasant evening together.”

It was not much to say, but there was an undertone of disappointment in his voice which touched me, and I felt as if only another word or two would have made me glad enough to creep back into the merino chrysalis and the warm fire-light of the dining-room. But that was all he said. Mr. Lowe never talked much about anything he felt. He led me to the door, and stood there whilst I got into the carriage. Oh! such a waft of *millefleurs* as I encountered from Mrs. Herman Kaye’s laced and embroidered handkerchief, and the pink and white roses that fluttered in her elaborate head-dress. The footman shut the door with a flourish, then lifting one white-gloved hand to his hat, said,—

“Where next, ma’am?”

I had not thought of the chance of this. The blood tingled up to my forehead, and the geraniums rolled from my fingers on the carriage floor. Mr. Euston Kaye stooped down and re-

turned them to me, with some whispered words of compliment, so softly whispered, indeed, that through each one of them I could hear his mother's dainty, high-bred, clearly-modulated tones;—

“To the Music-hall, Perkins, box entrance. Quick, for we are rather late.”

I gave one hurried glance towards Mr. Lowe. He was standing there yet, on the steps. That little softening touch of disappointment had quite died off from his face, and he looked so cold, and stiff, and stately, every feature gathered into that rigid self-control I knew so well. If he had seemed pained, as Maud does when anything grieves her, I should have felt a sort of pride in having such power over him; if angered and ruffled, I could have been icy and calm; but to see him with that fixed look, that had neither pain nor passion in it, made me feel so mean. It seemed as if that little moment had struck us far apart, each into our separate tracks, out of which we could never come to meet any more, never any more at all.

That is my last remembrance of Mr. Lowe,

as I saw him standing there at the hall door, the lamp-light from within throwing his shadow out upon the white steps, his arms folded carelessly and quietly, his whole face and form so utterly cold. The footman touched his hat again, and fastened up the steps with a jerk which made Mrs. Kaye's roses shake out a fresh waft of *millefleurs*, then he sprang to his place beside the coachman, and we were whirled away down the Marbrook road.

But looking back as long as I could, our hall door was still open, and the light streaming out upon the gravel walk; and though I could not see him, yet I knew that Mr. Lowe was standing there too.

I wrote as far as this a week ago. Then, as I sat up alone by my fire, I heard Stephen Roden's step in the garden, and presently his musical bass in the dining-room below, with Maud's soft cooing little voice. It gave me such a sharp grip of envy that I shut up the book and sat there with my face in my hands until it was time to go down to dinner. When I went into

the room my sister looked at me as if she thought I was very cross.

Oh, Maud! Maud!

I will finish it now, this Sunday afternoon. What else have I to do but remember? Pausing every now and then as I write, I can hear Mamma playing that quartet of Mendelssohn's, "Cast thy burden upon the Lord." Oh! if I could do that; but I can't. Well, no one knows anything about it, and that is a comfort.

Mrs. Kaye was all smiles and serene condescension; delighted, she said, to introduce so bright a star into the galaxy of Marbrook belles. Her son, Mr. Euston, a Penarva sort of gentleman, made a pompous little oration of the same tendency, and with sundry other sage remarks we filled up the long, dark ride to the Music-hall, which had been fitted up as a theatre for the occasion.

I can recall the room now, as we entered it,—the blaze of lights, the glitter of chandeliers, the dazzle of jewels, the strange intoxicating waft of perfume that swept to us over that parterre of flowers, laces, plumes, and

jewels. Mr. Euston Kaye conducted us to a slightly elevated range of seats on one side, whence we had a full view of the whole room. There was Sir Everard Albyn with his two daughters, Margaret and Blanch, resplendent in pink silk with tulle-illusion and pearls; and near them Lady Marbrook, under whose patronage the whole affair had been got up — in purple velvet with sweeping white feathers. The officers from the barracks were there, too, in their scarlet uniforms and shining epaulettes, which flashed back the light as they turned or bent over their fair companions. Cluster after cluster came in, until the whole amphitheatre of seats seemed one brilliant mass of colour,—mauve, pink, azure, crimson, gold, picked out here and there with the sober black costumes of gentlemen in full dress. And at every move of the stately heads there was a sparkle of jewels, or a waving of snowy plumes, or a floating of clouds of vapoury tulle, or a waft of delicious scent, eddying up from lace handkerchiefs and many-tinted bouquets, and jewelled

caskets. Suddenly, a hush,—it had begun. The curtain was drawn up.

No. I will not describe it. I shall never forget it, so what need to write it here. That wildly bright scene which I looked at then for the first time, and shall see no more, for I never mean to go again as long as I live. I can understand now, how, once drawn into that whirl of excitement, one may alike lose sense, and repose, and thought, and live for nothing else. Over me, and around me, and through me, it waved, and rippled, and floated—that beautiful music, mingled with the dazzle and the perfume, and the gorgeous colouring, until, weary and intoxicated, I shut my eyes and listened to it in a dream.

It came at last, the song of Beatrice—her song—the song I had waited for so long, with its weird-like long-drawn notes and strange abrupt leaps of sound, and wailing, reproachful cadences, and passionate bursts of scorn—all rendered just as *she* rendered them, with power gathered from a life of wrong. When it was over there came a wild torrent of applause,

waving of handkerchiefs, flinging of bouquets, shouts of *encore, encore*, and renewed peals of triumph as the singer came on the stage and went through it again.

Why was it that, listening to those well-remembered phrases, a sharp, quick pang came over me? I lost sight of the present, its brilliance, dazzle, and glare, and there came in its place that long ago morning on the rocks—the waving of many-tinted plumes of bright sea-weed; the silvery ripple of waves on the answering shore; the deep, quiet, blue sea; the sky above as quiet and as blue; the voice that had spoken to me then. And with the remembrance of all these, there came up, too, the words and thoughts of that morning, and glimpses of something noble and real that might have been.

The song was done. The other singers returned to their parts, fresh bursts of glorious music came ringing on the air, but still that past held its place. By and by it changed into our home at Braeton, and I pictured what



they would be doing just then, at the time for evening prayers. Papa, or Mr. Lowe, reading the chapter; Maud, with her quiet earnest face; Mamma, pale, patient, and calm; perhaps Stephen Roden, too—all holy thoughts nestling down among them, I only the alien. And then, from that home picture so full of peace, I opened my eyes on the garish scene before me, and wished it over.

It was very late when we came out. There was a great rush and calling for carriages, and tramping of impatient horses, and pattering of white satin shoes on the pavement, and gleaming of dresses and gay-coloured opera-cloaks among the lamps; and groups of ragged children and desolate-looking women gathered under the arches to watch the company come away; and from the gin-palace just opposite there were shouts of rude merriment and wild harsh laughter, as some drunken fellow came reeling out from its filthy atmosphere. And there were soft, cooing voices of dainty ladies, tired of waiting so long for their carriages; and over all there bent the blue sky and the stars—

they only peaceful where everything else was full of tumult.

Mrs. Kaye saw that I was tired, so she let me alone during the ride home, and said she would come and talk it all over with me next morning. It must have been nearly midnight when we reached Braeton. Maud was in the room waiting for me; she had a fire made and coffee ready for me — thoughtful little creature; and had got out my loose dressing-gown and slippers. She didn't look a bit tired, but had a pleasant restful smile upon her face, as if she had just come to me out of some beautiful dream that had hardly left her yet. I had hoped, I had almost been sure, that Mr. Lowe would have waited to say good night to me; however, he was not there, and I did not like to ask about him, so we went up stairs. Then she helped me off with my finery, laid my wreath and bouquet on the dressing-table, threw my dress over a chair, with the white cloak upon it, and then said good night, kissing me before she went away.

I could not go to sleep for long. The whole scene kept dancing and flickering before me; and

continually ringing in my ears were those words from the song of Beatrice, with the music that belongs to them : —

“There is a snake in thy smile, my dear,  
And a bitter poison within thy tear.”

Eerie words, truly, and enough to conjure up evil dreams — as indeed they did. For I thought I was standing on a sea-shore, and the waves came swinging and dashing up all around me — waves of human faces, some dark, some light, crowned with flowers and jewels; and thousands of eyes glared upon me, and I heard wild, sharp crashes of music. Then it all melted down and cleared away, just as the tide rolls back, and I was in our wood, Lingold Wood, on the little bridge over the lake, with the red and crimson autumn leaves dropping down one by one into the water, and floating lazily along to the Mar-brook. Only Mr. Lowe was not there, and as I turned round to the place where he had stood that Sunday afternoon, which I remembered even in my dream, there was a little snake, with bright jewel eyes, curling and quivering close beside me. I sprang

away from it, and it tracked my footsteps, never touching but always following me; and I could hear it rattling over the dead leaves, and felt the brightness of its keen eyes fastened upon me.

So dreaming on, and dreaming still eerier dreams, I woke at last, as if roused by the quick tramp of horses' feet on the gravel walk under my window; and as I opened my eyes, the sound grew fainter and fainter, and I saw the grey morning light struggling in through the curtains.

Ah! then it had all been a dream. I had not been to that opera at all, and I should have a long quiet morning's talk with Mr. Lowe again, nothing coming between us. No; it was indeed true still. For there was my wreath on the table, and the flowers which Euston, Kaye had sent me, shrivelled up beside it, and my gay dress, looking pale and ghastly in the dim light. And with the sight of them came a weary, dreary sense of something wrong, a something that perhaps could never be made quite right again. What a different waking from that one on Sunday morning, when infinite joy and peace had come with the dawn.

Never mind, I would tell him as soon as ever we were alone together, how sorry I was that I had gone, and that it should be my first and last experience of that sort of gaiety. Smoothing things over in this way, I began to dress. But it was not easy, much as I wished it, to make myself look nice this morning, as it had been the night before, for my eyes were heavy and my cheeks pale, and I had a dull brooding headache. Maud was downstairs singing in the dining-room. The fresh, bright voice, it flushed and sparkled in the music — oh! how much more beautiful than what I had heard the night before, for it sang of a heart at rest.

Breakfast was over when I came down stairs. Mamma was working in the window; Papa and Maud reading the lessons for the day; my coffee was waiting for me on a little stand by the fire, and everything looked just as it always did, no sign of company, no alteration of our customary morning arrangements.

“Mr. Lowe has a fine morning for his journey,” Papa said.

“Yes; he will be a hundred miles away by

now; the train started at five, I would have had him stay longer," replied Mamma, "but he seemed so anxious to get away early."

"Mr. Lowe gone—where?" I said, with a cold, dead, stupid feeling coming upon me. It was well I had a headache to plead, for I must have looked very miserable.

"Oh, Mabel, I didn't think to tell you last night, but he found it necessary to return to the north, and set off early this morning, before any of us were up. He would not let us see him away, for fear of giving trouble. He left his compliments for you, and regretted he had not the opportunity of bidding you a formal farewell. I don't know why he need have said that though, for Mr. Lowe is never what I should call formal in anything. I think he must have had unpleasant news in that letter which came by the afternoon post; he seemed restless and out of spirits. I wonder if we shall ever see him again, Papa. I feel as if I wanted to know him."

"I don't know," Papa said; "he did not mention anything about coming again, though I am sure he will always be welcome."

It was no time for me to feel or to think. There was only one thing I had to do just then, and that was to look calm, to express my regret in a quiet commonplace sort of a way, to wish him safely to the end of his journey, and so forth ; and to answer Maud's questions about last night's raree-show with pleasant indifference, though the very life was dying within me all the time. While we were yet talking of him, Mrs. Herman Kaye came to call and talk the opera over with me, and I chattered and laughed and criticised the dresses, and went into raptures over the music, and thanked her loudly for her kindness in giving me such a treat. Then Miss Ducie came for her singing practice ; and the first thing after dinner, Miss Gabbatis brought her work and stayed tea, shaking her pleasant little rattle of chit-chat upon everything that was going on in the village, — Miss Phebe Sharrup's approaching marriage with Mr. Golden Brown,—Mr. Lowe's beautiful sermon on Sunday morning,—poor Marian Rae's death—it seemed to me not so very hard to die *now*,—Miss Ducie's engagement and the beautiful presents she had got ; with all other little

matters, bright or sad, which go to make up the patchwork of human life. I, talking pleasantly all the while, and working away at my crayon drawing of Raphael's Madonna, and trying the best I could to hold down that black bubbling under-current that would keep working up through the quiet unconscious ripples of social intercourse.

Not until night, when rest of some kind comes to all,—when the armour that has pressed so tight is laid away,—when the disguises we have worn so wearily drop from us, and leave us face to face with ourselves,—when the mask that grief has carried all day falls off, and she creeps close up to us, never to quit us until morning toil gives us leave to forget her for awhile; not until night when my sister Maud slept and dreamed of the happy time to come—could, I brush away this crust of shams and hollownesses, and lock my room door, and sit down here in the dull, deadening October gloom, to ponder it all. Not to weep over it, not to pray over it, I could not do either then—but with regret, hotter and bitterer than any tears, and longings



deeper and more earnest than any prayers I have ever said yet,—to watch over the corpse of my poor dead hope.

These lines have been running in my thoughts for many days. Where have I heard them? or did Mrs. Tresilis show me them in a book of American poetry that evening we waited for the people to come home from the flower show.

“Of all the sad words of tongue or pen,  
The saddest words are these—it might have been.”

“Ah! well for us all, some bright hope lies  
Deeply buried from mortal eyes.”

So far, so true. But then comes some more.

“Yet, from its grave, in God’s hereafter may  
Some white-robed angel roll the stone away.”

Query, will any angel, white-robed or otherwise, ever roll the stone from this grave? Better not. It is nowise pleasant to look upon the grewsome face of death,—and that is all I shall ever see there.

And now I will give over, for it only wants

half an hour to church time, and I must get ready to say a form of thanksgiving for "creation, preservation, and the blessings of this life," whilst my heart is asking why I ever came into it at all.

## CHAPTER X.

*Braeton, December 31st.* — Oh ! this dreary, dreary winter time, when will it be over ? How these grey mists deaden and stagnate one's energies ; how one's very life goes creeping, wearying, "soodling" on, under the burden of a perpetual fog. . If one could only have a downright cutting frost to crisp up all these damp dead leaves, that the next wind might sweep them off and away ; or if there would come a fair mantle of snow to whiten over these brown fields and moorlands, and to cover these long black ranges of withered gorse and ling that looked so purple and golden only four months ago. Or if, into that *other* air, there might come a keen, sharp, cutting frost, to curl up the rotting leaves of old memories, and send them drifting away before the fresh winds of

hope; or, if from that other sky, there might come the soft cold snow of forgetfulness to cover up these dead pleasures and give them peaceful burial, and then hide their graves that one might look upon them no more. For December fogs without, and December fogs within too, are very hard to bear patiently.

There is one comfort, no one knows anything about it. No one thinks that night by night, and often far into the morning too, I sit here, vainly crying out over a past that will never come back to me any more. Maud little knows, as she talks to me so simply, so artlessly, dear child, of her sunny future, that I once had one just as bright. It is better so—much better so. Of all things, I can least bear sympathy; much more comfortable is it to be like the Spartan boy, who let the bird eat through to his heart, rather than confess he had stolen it. Not a fable that altogether, nor by any means without its antitype in these sleek, comely, well-fed modern times of ours. People often suffer a good deal more than we give them credit for. And it is noble to suffer; yes, it is

very noble ; it raises us, it purifies us. I know now what those two lines mean :—

“Knowledge by suffering entereth,  
And life is perfected by death.”

I hear Maud's bonnie, winsome voice in the dining-room just now, chequered with Stephen Roden's rough deep bass—like a little silver stream trickling along through a grand pine forest. How those two love one another, so quietly, but so truly, so earnestly. They will be very happy, I know they will. Heaven has given them all the sunshine, and me all the pain ; and though I sometimes try very hard, I cannot say “Even so, Father.” I won't think about it, it makes me impatient. I might have been just as happy, nay happier—for I can both enjoy and suffer more deeply than she can. I fancy sometimes her love is too calm to be very, very strong. I fancy sometimes, if Stephen Roden were to die, she might love some one else. But I cannot tell. I may not be right. These calm voices, these quiet faces, often cover a great deal of feeling.

Well, this year is getting over at last, and I am thankful for it. What a wide space seems set

between us and our joys or sorrows by that little glancing moment of time which separates the old year from the new! When anything belonging to us has gone over the border-land into "last year," it appears so far away. We think of it as we do of friends that are dead. I like to be drawing near to it—this meeting time of past and present—for then days that are gone come back upon us in all their fresh reality. Thought looks along the little quivering thread of time to gleams of shade and sunshine, to touches of joy and sadness. Spring, summer, autumn, winter; is there not something like these in our own hearts? Do we not find there, too, the budding leaf, the opening flower, the fevered glow of decay, the snows of death and sleep? Say, Mabel Harcourt, don't you think it is so? Often in times like this, you have sat in silence and alone, gathering up the scattered links of the past, and chaining them together again. Often you have scanned the far-stretching landscape of the past, with its lights and shadows, its shady resting-places and perplexing bypaths, its sunny distances and cloudless skies; and you have let the garish future depart for a time with

all its hopes and fears, that you might commune with your own heart and be still. But say, did you ever do so with feelings like those which come over you now? Did ever the curtains of the past shadow a scene so beautiful, yet so sad, as that from which you part them now? In that little year, the story of a life is folded. There rest, perhaps, more memories of joy than life will ever have for you again. There may be years before you yet, but never one like this—so bright, and then so clouded; so full of hope, and then so utterly blank and silent. Spring, summer, autumn, winter; yes, you can trace them all, and when you think thereon you weep. You once thought you would have to remember this past for its joy; *now*, you can never forget it for its sadness. Poor Mabel, poor Mabel!

Well, no more tears for it. Even when I was a baby I never used to cry, and I won't begin now. Good-bye, old year! I lay you down to rest: sleep well! Fold fast round you your thick veil of forgetfulness, and don't look at me any more out of those mournful eyes of yours. I won't meet them; I won't give you gaze for gaze.

I loved you once when you were here. I loved you for the kindly gift you brought me ; would I had loved you better—would I had prized you more, for then you would not look so sadly on me ! Good-bye, old year, good-bye ! Take back that beautiful wonder-flower of yours ; I once thought you would have given me it, but it was not so to be. You just reached it out to me, that I might get a waft of its perfume, and see its soft brilliant colouring ; but when I would have taken it for myself, you held it back, and hid it from me. Was it kind of you, old year, was it kind ? You brought my sister Maud a flower from your store of June beauty, and she has it yet ; why was mine taken away so soon, old year, tell me ?

Yes, you are going. Only just one more pulse of your stout old heart left. You will lie down to-night to sleep, hale and strong, even as thousands of people do, and in the morning you will wake and find yourself here no longer ; a young, frisky, frolicking thing lying in your place, with everybody petting him, and making parties for him, and deafening him with peals of bells, just as they did you when you were young—and making



all sorts of fine promises to him, and saying how well they will use him, and how they will stuff him with good deeds and kind intentions, and give him everything that he wants; while you, poor old thing, find yourself dead, defunct, stranded on the shores of the great hereafter, as Mrs. Tresilis would say;—and that reminds me the letter I wrote to her was sent back to me this morning from the Dead-letter office;—and nobody to think about you, nobody to give you a decent tear, nobody to remember you, except me, old year; and I will, yes, I will remember you.

Once more, good-bye. I, too, shall pass away, and come to meet you somewhere in that dim, solemn future. Speak kindly to me just once more, and so let me come that I may meet you as a friend.

*January.*—Yes, it is over now; and I think of it peacefully. Through all its course I have stood by the grave of no loved one. The angel of death has never crossed this threshold to take from us any of those we cared for. But I am thinking there are other graves besides those in which the

damp, dismal coffin lies, and over which we plant black yews and weeping willows. There are graves of friendship, graves where we would weep our very lives away, if we could only bring back the treasures which lie there—graves that can never grow green again, how long soever the dews of heaven may fall upon them ; graves that——

Steady there, Mabel Harcourt, you're getting foolish. The land of sentiment is a dangerous place for people in your circumstances. True, there are one or two pretty prospects in it, some cloudless skies and purple distances ; but there are also many precipices, and not a few most unromantic quagmires, into which you might stumble and grievously soil the white garments of your propriety. Better stick to the old beaten track, Mabel—the king's high-road of common sense, keeping a sharp look out for the guide-posts of experience, and setting your feet firmly down in the ruts of custom—those ruts of which you spoke so slightly not very long ago. For even ruts are useful upon occasion, and serve to keep such adventurous vehicles as your own in the right road. Sentiment is very well, Mabel, for idle young

ladies to toy with, and plant a few of its dark melancholy leaves into the flower-bed of their hearts, by way of producing an effect—just as we put boughs of yew and cypress to tone down the too light colours of gorgeous autumn nosegays; but for you, who don't happen to have much colour of any sort left to tone down, it is not the right thing, not the right thing at all. And for this grave, Mabel, that you talk about, over which you sing such a pretty musical dirge, don't think that any strange thing has happened to you. Disappointment, that sturdy old sexton, has dug more graves than any other of his profession. The world is one great cemetery, full of them. This whole, gay, careless, upper-crust social life of ours is studded thickly as it can hold with the mounds of such graves, over which we walk unconsciously. Some of them marked with perpetual monuments of pale faces and solemn tones, and windy sighs; others, and these are the deepest, covered with the green moss of silence, and watched over at night by mourners who dare not come to them in the day time. Don't cry out, Mabel, then, because at last you too have had

to buy a grave in this great cemetery, to bury your dead hope in; don't call your friends and neighbours round you to the funeral, to see how deep it is, and how many tears you can shed upon it. Let the poor dead corpse down reverently, silently; cover it up tenderly, and smoothe a little mound over it, reading meanwhile that brief burial service of all earthly joy, so full of sad truth, yet so instinct with hope:—

“That which thou sowest is not quickened, *except it die.*”

And then turn away back again to your old daily working life. Coming sometimes in the leisure of thought and stillness to that great cemetery where your hope lies, you will find yourself not alone. You will meet many mourners on the same errand—for there are but few in this world who have no possession *there*. Don't you think sometimes that Miss Nunly has more than one mound that she comes to watch by, though she has never told you of it? Doesn't even little Miss Gabbatis hush her merry chirp now and then, and calm down her busy thoughts, and put on for a while the mourning of silence, while she goes there to

weep over a grave that you have never seen? Ah! Mabel, you don't know how, night after night, when the day's work of smiles, and talk, and social cheerfulness is done, a great company, like Mary of old, go to the grave to weep there.

And don't weary, or think that all is lost. Our friends, our hopes, too, sometimes are never so real to us as when they are gone. Never do they speak to us so lovingly, never do they draw us on so winningly, never are they so truly ours. A grave there, Mabel, a place to weep over and ponder over, is often a great possession. The estate of suffering is the noblest heirship of our nature, the one wherein we may rise to all that is best, brightest, if only we work out all its capabilities, and guard well the treasures it holds for us.

So, then, do not whine over this new-made grave of yours. Do not wreathe it over with tinsel flowers, or stick crosses upon it, and place yourself beside it in broad daylight, that people may see how beautifully you can feel. Rather go along steadily and bravely, and with a cheerful countenance, morning by morning, to such work as there is for you to do; folding over yourself and

all that you feel, the pleasant coloured garb of social kindness, beneath which no one will ever care to look and see how much it hides. Only, when night comes, and there is no more work for you to do, no more idle talk to sustain, no more disguise to be worn, come and sit by this grave again, solemnly, reverently, as those should do who wear in their hearts the sign-manual of heaven, the holy seal of suffering. Hopefully, too, for in time to come that dead friendship shall wake; not here, perhaps, but hereafter, and meet you again, instinct with new life and beauty. Tears, entirely of grief, and silence, entirely of despair, are not what we should give to any earthly hope or to any earthly friend, over whose grave we may write the blessed, Christ-given word, "*Resurgam.*" Courage then, Mabel.

Very beautiful, oh Mentor of mine, whosoever you may be, sitting by me this half hour past, and speaking to me with such a calm, still voice! Very beautiful, but very cold, even as the marble statue Pygmalion loved so well. No words of yours can undo the past, or cover the wrong which makes its sharpest sting. One may stand proudly

calm and heroic by the grave of innocent grief; but when folly and error lie there too, it is not so easy to be still. What shall I do, and which way shall I turn? How shall I weary on through a life in which there is neither hope nor memory of any sort of gladness? Shall I go back again to the old way? Shall I be the Mabel Harcourt of twelve months ago, when first I began to write here—proud, and cold, and self-sufficient as I was before these foolish fancies came? Shall I be content once more with admiration and deference, and weary no longer for love? When did it ever bring anything but sorrow?—"the end of all rest, the beginning of all tumult." Let me do without it, then. Let me make my own life; let me stand in my own place; and there, quiet, calm, and unmoved, watch the slow, sleepy, changeful drifting on of a world in which I have neither stake nor interest, and nothing to do but to be patient.

No. *He* would not have me do so. Is there not something better than this left for me? I cannot sweep away the past myself; I cannot make anything worthy of the future; I cannot

even ennoble the present. But there is One who can. I will begin life again, humbly, meekly, even as a little child. I will gather up the wrecks of this poor bygone year, not to build them together again, but only to ask pardon for them. I will leave this dry land, this wilderness where no water is.

“I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto him, Father, I have *sinned* against Heaven, and in thy sight.”



## CHAPTER XI.

So the days wore on, and the old year was slowly passing away.

Mr. and Mrs. Harcourt never cared to watch this meeting time of past and present. Life brought little else to them but a quiet, even round of daily cares and pleasant resting-places. They walked hand in hand from one year to another, thankfully and patiently, and looked not much backward or forward. Perhaps we shall all of us do the same when half a century of life has placed the brilliant lights and shadows of youth very far behind us, and we have learned to dip not so deeply into our own hearts, or draw so heavily on the power of recollection that is in them. Early in life we make very much of our joys and sorrows, but as time draws on we take

both more quietly; not springing forward with such eager step to meet coming joy, and, thank God! not so utterly cast down and wearied by the sorrow which would once have crushed us to the ground. It is a merciful thing this shading of grey which draws over us like the twilight when day is past, and makes all things, if not bright, at least soft and pleasant.

So on New Year's Eve everything went on just the same at Braeton Lodge. Manley and Joan sat down to their sewing in the kitchen after tea; perhaps putting on the fire a yule log which the carpenter's boy had brought in anticipation of a New Year's gift; but if they forgot it, it made no difference. At ten they went in to prayers, when Mr. Harcourt always read the last chapter in the Revelation, and thanked God that they had been safely brought to the close of another year. After that the doors were bolted, Jip's blanket was thrown over his cage, the cat was marshalled into her bed in the cupboard close by the kitchen fire, and the whole family retired to rest.

Except Maud and Mabel. They always made up a pleasant fire, and stayed downstairs in the

dining-room until the new year came in. They used to talk over many things, alone ; heart to heart talk, until the last half hour came, and then generally there fell a great silence between them ; and while the chimes of Braeton bells came faintly through the still night air, they sat and thought. Maud prayed. Mabel had never done that yet ; but perhaps the time might not be far away when she, too, white-robed in perfect peace, might watch the new year in while her soul knelt on God's throne-steps.

It was eleven o'clock now. Maud sat there in the low rocking-chair, her head resting on her hands, her deep grey eyes looking out at the flames that leaped and flickered in the grate, casting broad lights and shadows on the white marble chimney-piece, and thence to the distant corners of the room, and on the scroll-pattern paper, and among the heavy folds of the curtains, and on the Parian vase with its sculptured doves that stood on a little table in the recess — its sculptured doves gleaming white through greenery and scarlet berries, and folding their pure wings over a little bird's nest which Maud had put

there. Only a nest, — a little soft, warm, mossy nest. And yet what a great deal there was in it, and belonging to it, for Stephen Roden had got it for her after the young birds had left it, that first long walk they had together to the Lingold watercourse. And always now there seemed to be such a brood of pleasant home-thoughts nestling there, such a cluster of innocent, safely-sheltered hopes, over which the doves' white wings kept guard.

Mabel lay upon the sofa, the shadow of Canova's nymph falling upon her face, half hiding, half revealing the meaning of the stately features, deepening the sweep of the curved eyebrow, and the line so proud and fixed of the still lips, and passing to and fro, as the firelight moved it, upon her high forehead. And the statue's calm, white moveless face seemed to look down with a sort of unspoken questioning into her own proud and stately one, and ponder its changeful meaning; for Mabel was not at rest yet. The lines of her destiny were not fixed; there was no peace in her face, albeit the hush of a great silence lay upon it now. There was no track of sure guidance

marked for her as yet, where she might walk with steady footsteps and eyes bent onward in hope, and a heart at ease, through the far distances of coming years. Light was very near that would show her the right way, but it had not dawned yet; a hand was very close to her that was henceforth to take hold of hers, and lead her along always, but now she was groping painfully for it, reaching out into the gloom, if haply she might find something to clasp and cling to.

There was no one else in the room but these two, and those unseen presences which were thronging round them both, waiting for greeting or farewell before the old year closed. Such a year as neither of them would ever have any more — a year that had brought them what no other year could bring, or take away either; for that which had come to Maud and Mabel since last time they had sat there alone in the firelight was what no time nor chance could ever part from them. Either in memory or actual presence, it would always be theirs, the great working power of their whole lives, the one overmastering influence which must henceforth shape their charac-

ters and mould their future, and be to them for all coming time a very noble and earnest reality.

Quiet little Maud, as she sat there thinking about it all, with a quaint smile, half pleasant, half serious, upon her face, — a puzzled, perplexed sort of expression, — as though trying to take to pieces and unravel the many-coloured web of life, and examine separately and distinctly each glittering thread; then weave them back again and look upon the whole in its blended beauty, its perfect, completed design; if, in the childhood of this decaying year, now dying out so silently, some little fairy had whispered in her ear the story it should have to tell, or in the cloud-land of dreams pictured out before her all the brilliant colours of this yet unwoven web — what would she have said? What unbelieving wonder would have looked out of her quiet eyes! How she would have shaken her brown-haired little head, and put the gay vision aside with a wave of her busy fingers, and set herself more industriously than ever to the mending of those rare old damask cloths, or the stitching of the household linen, or to the performing of those

thousand and one matter-of-fact home duties, of which her life was so full! Maud, — quiet, grey-like, still little Maud, — ever win anybody's heart; Maud ever be told that her wee hands held the key of a great, strong, noble soul like Stephen Roden's; that all its thoughts lay open to her, all its hopes gathered round her, — Maud, with her silent, steady ways, her quaint little face, her shy, unworldly tastes, — Maud, who just seemed made to trot along through life on one of its snuggest, quietest by-roads, to write stories for her school-children, to make jellies for sick old women, to look after the housekeeping for her mamma, to be a sort of sober, unvarnished, dark green leaf for the brilliant colouring of Mabel's talents to shine out brighter upon, a monotonous little hum-drum tune, good for nothing but to hush household cares to sleep, and be listened to when there was nothing else to do — this Maud ever be loved, admired, coveted, caressed, and cared for! Yes, it was strange, very strange. To Maud, but strange to no one else.

There she sits in the old rocking-chair; only the lids have fallen over the grey eyes, and the

lips are half parted into a smile *all* pleasant now. And beams and ripples of gladness flash over the quiet little face; and her hands are folded peacefully upon her lap, the slender fingers clasping each other in such perfect repose. Why should they not, when Stephen Roden's grasp is the last they felt, scarce two hours gone. Ah! Maud, it has come to you at last, that golden light without which life is only half complete; and the future is all sunned over with one bright smile, and made musical by one voice; and the stream of fancy runs babbling along over mossy banks and waving flowers, beneath cloudless skies, and whispering thick green leafy branches, while over all the birds of hope carol out their joy-song, and the sunshine of perfect trust warms, and glows, and sparkles.

Happy little Maud! be welcome to it all; look at it while you can, Maud; be grateful while it lasts. Don't ask if next year will be as glad-some as this; don't ask if the little young moments waiting so impatiently to be chimed in with merry new-year bells, will ever swell into a great,



black, bitter past, which no tears can wash white, no prayers ever quiet or remove. Hear the glad, sweet playing of Fancy on the chords of Hope; lie back quietly, restfully, in the soft arms of Memory, and thank God for it all. Sitting there now in the flickering half-brightness of that fire-twilight, you might catch, if you listened for it, the quick panting sob of the railway-whistle as it cuts through the darkness and silence of the Braeton woods. But don't listen, Maud; just rest upon the present, and let it be enough for you. Why should those who are loved look either forward or behind? Why should they not clasp the golden fulness of the happy Now, and feel it is all they need?

The bells of the old church slowly rang out the last speaking of the year. Wandering through the cold December air, the musical faint words came upon Maud's ear, and seemed to say "Good-bye, good-bye;" and when they were all said, the wind seemed still to hold the sound in a faint under-tone, and say "Good-bye, good-bye,"

swinging the words hither and thither, now soft, now loud. Then all was very quiet. Even the long bare jasmine branches that had been beating against the window hung silent and motionless; and the whistling sound of the wind through the great beech-tree sighed away and came back no more. Upon everything there had fallen an utter stillness, as though for a few moments the young year would stand reverently over the old one's grave, for thought and recollection, ere it came dancing forth to meet its noisy welcome of chimes and merriment. Just once again Maud thought she could hear that faint, far-off sound, that seemed to say "Good-bye;" only once, and for the last time. She would hear that farewell no more in the home of her youth. The golden gate stood open before her, and she must pass through its shining portals, leaving behind her the years of her girlhood, with all that belonged to them, all of careless ease, and unburdened thought that had been their dower, and go forth to meet and respond to the manifold chimes and changes of life. What measure they should ring for her,

— what tones should fall from their many voices, sad or happy, or serious, or calm, — no one might tell; only that she must henceforth listen to them before all others, and forget or remember but as a dream, the long-way-back and musical bells of childhood, and the misty, waif-like murmuring chime of her girlish days.

So she sat there with folded hands, thinking over the past once more; lingering over it lovingly, longingly, ere the threshold of that golden gate was past, and she would linger over it so never again. She thought of years gone by, when she had sat just where she sat now, listening to other old years as they said good-bye; and she recalled heart toil and longing, restless yearnings, disappointment and vexation of spirit which had sometimes marked their course; for even Maud had not been always calm. The stream of her life had flowed over many a rising rock and fretting shallow, been ruffled many a time by sudden gusts and impetuous rains, ere it ran its way out into the deep, clear, quiet channel. But these were all past now. So were the wondering

and waiting, the thoughts that had travelled so far, the fancies so wild often and restless, all were gone, gathered up, and laid away ; and one single heart held all Maud's dreams of happiness, all her waking thoughts and hopes. A great deal it was for one heart to hold, but that heart was very strong and true ; it would keep them safely, Maud knew it would ; and she was not afraid to trust them there. Oh ! what a rest it was, this entire trust she had in Stephen Roden, this feeling that her future was very safe in his hands, that upon everything that he said and everything that he did there lay the broad, free stamp of truth, the sign patent of heaven's own nobility.

Yet Maud loved to linger a little longer over the past, to shake hands one by one with its joys and sorrows, its hopes and fears ; to take them up separately and leisurely ; to think of them as they once stood to her, so very earnest, so very full of life meaning, and to say to them, " I have no need of you any more ; you are nothing to me now. I have done with you ; I say good-bye to you, just as this old year has said good-bye to me,

and gone quietly away. There is another life track lying before me now, wider than this old one that you made for me, for two of us will have to walk in it; and fuller of beauty, and fuller of thought and purpose, and leading onward, always onward, until it leaves us at the gates of that other and yet more glorious life. Good-bye, old life, good-bye."

So the new year came dancing in; and Mabel lay there still and dreaming, with the firelight throwing the shadow of Canova's nymph upon her proud face. And Maud leaned back with folded hands, and visions thronging thick and fast under her closed eyelids. And the flame-shadows gleamed upon the vase with its sculptured doves, that brooded over the warm-lined mossy nest; and the wind came again slowly sweeping up the orchard boughs and over the old beech-tree; and at intervals, with quick wild pant and uncertain sound, shrieking and quivering through the night stillness, there came up among the Braeton woods the old familiar railway-

whistle, that never stopped for old years or new ones, nor ever cared how coldly, before another twelvemonth had passed, its hoarse, monotonous voice might fall upon the ear of some who scarcely listened to it now.

## CHAPTER XII.

*Braeton, April 10th.*—Maud is to be married in July, and Stephen Roden resigns the agency in a week or two. He has bought that quaint, old-fashioned spot, the manor house at Glington, just past Lingold wood, on the Marbrook road, and the workmen are busy over it now, for it has to be finished within a few weeks. Mamma and I begin to look with a critical eye at pretty damasks in the upholsterers' windows, and talk profoundly on the subject of carpets, paper-hangings, and so forth. Except in midsummer time, when the leaves are so thick, we can see the house from the bridge on Lingold lake; and Maud and I have been there to look at it and talk over her bright, sunny future. But she never goes farther than that. She will never accompany

mamma and me when we set off on exploring expeditions after tit-bits of furniture ; nor can all Stephen's arguments persuade her to see for herself how pretty the wainscoted parlour looks, now that he has got it fitted up with his old carved oak. She says she never means to enter it again except as her home. I like that sort of feeling. I think, if I were going to be married, I could not go peeping into and inspecting my future residence, and talking about its arrangements as I have known some girls do. But it is small use speculating as to what I should do or not do, for I suppose this Braeton is the only place that will ever be home to me.

It is a pleasant old spot is Glinton Manor ; just such as Maud likes, she always had such a fancy for moss-grown antiquity and long-past associations. It has fine old gables, with curious carving running along under the tiled roof, and quaint-looking brazen fowls, in act to fly, doing duty as weathercocks in various parts of the building. Then there are wainscoted rooms and latticed casements, and a long, stately corridor, with an oriel window looking out over the terrace



walk and away to Glinton wood. And such bonnie little nooks and corners here and there and everywhere in the old-fashioned garden; shady arbours formed by large Portugal laurels, and winding walks that lead you beneath lilacs and honeysuckles no one knows where, until you come out of them close upon the mossy banks of the Mar brook, or the fountain pond with its white water-lilies, or perhaps upon the black aisles and ferny solitudes of Glinton wood. And to crown all, there is a rookery not two hundred yards away, so that one may sit in the oriel window, or under the old elm-tree on the grass-plot, and listen by the hour together to their comfortable colloquies. I do like these old-fashioned houses: and then she won't be so far away from us after all, not so much as a mile, hardly ten minutes' walk from the Lingold bridge. Only that I never like to cross that bridge now.

I think they will be very happy. Stephen is so honest, and brave, and strong, and Maud so trusting. She is just like a child to him, and he is so fond of taking care of her, and putting his protecting arm between her and everything

that could weary or stumble her. How pleasant it must be to go about with this feeling of being cared for and watched over! Dear little Maud, I hope she will never have any trouble. She is just one of those who would be crushed by it; either die out at once, or live on a patient, weary, hopeless life till the end came. And yet I don't know. Those tender little blue harebells in Lingold wood are bent down sometimes almost to the earth, and rise straight and even again; it is the tall, strong, hardy tree that snaps in the storm, and falls down dead and lifeless, never to look at the sunlight any more.

It was only the other day she asked me to go with her to the bridge on Lingold lake. It was the first time I had been since that Sunday afternoon last October. I could not deny her, so we went, talking all the way of careless, commonplace things, for it was no time to dip below the current then, and bring up into words the thoughts that lay there. When we got to the bridge, how different everything was: no autumn leaves dropping and crimsoning the water; no brown acorns rustling down through thinning branches to their

mossy bed ; no sunset sky watching its purple glory in the deep, broad lake ; no dim, warm haze over the distant hills. But, instead, the soft, manifold tints of the early spring ; the first faint burst of tiny green buds on myriads of brown and russet branches ; the tender colouring of young lilacs and chestnuts side by side with the shaggy arms of black yew-trees and spiky clusters of gorse. And the water danced clear and fresh beneath us, laughing and sparkling as it went, and not with that slow, dreamy motion it had when we two looked at it. The whole scene was like Maud's coming life, — just ready to burst into the full glory of summer, while for me the autumn had passed, and God only knew if ever the spring should come again.

She was looking at the grey old gables of the manor house, that could be well seen through the half-clothed branches of the April trees — mossy, worn, and antique, amid all else that was young. I put my hand silently into hers, and we walked on together, she calm and happy in her thoughts, with that beautiful smile glinting over her face which I have seen there so often

lately. With her it was all future, with me it was all past. And then looking shyly and quickly up to see if there would be sympathy for her, she began to tell me in her innocent girlish way about Stephen, Mr. Roden, as she always calls him; his kindness, his thoughtfulness, his strong true-heartedness; and again and again she said to me, with that rich undertone of pride in her voice: "Mabel, isn't it pleasant to be loved so?"

I let her talk on, the darling, never telling her—why should I?—that I knew it all; that she was only telling of hopes and gloryings which for me were long ago past and buried; that every innocent, unconscious word of hers was making me feel just desperate, quiet and kind though I seemed to her. I shall never tell anyone about it. As time wears on, it becomes easier to hide our true self, and to show the world another face than that we turn within. And so, still hand in hand, we came homewards, and when we got to the garden gate, Stephen was waiting for her. So I left them and went in alone—always alone now.

No, not quite alone. Standing as I have done for many months, apart from my old self, looking

at that long ago time, and thinking of hopes separated from me now by long wastes of patient endurance, I could, like Sterling, weep, not with sadness, but with a feeling there is no name for. All has been done for me so wisely, so well. Truly we see not *now* the bright light which is in the clouds, but the wind passeth over them and cleanseth them. I can sometimes, though not always, look forward quietly to a life of loneliness. I, who was so thirsty for admiration, so greedy to be all in all, am learning to walk patiently through a long life wherein I shall be dearest, best, to no one ; and say at each step of it, " Even so, Father." After all there are other things in life than mere loving and being loved ; and if I cannot dance along over coming days and years with merry step, I may, at least, walk quietly, and with some sort of dignity, along the path that is set before me.

Yes, I would not be without this past of mine ; this sorrowful, heavy-laden past. Though sometimes the tears come into my eyes when I think how he went away without giving me time to say I was sorry I had grieved him ; that the last look

I remember of his was one of reproach: when I think that I can never tell him, never any more at all, how I think of these things now. Ah, well! if he never knows about it here, he will elsewhere. He will not look reproachfully at me in that other world where we shall know even as we are known; having learned all, he will forgive all. Only it would be such a great rest to think that he had done so even here.

Maud is very busy over her wedding clothes. How her little fingers do dance and flicker on the work! How patiently she travels along over those interminable lengths of embroidery, and frilling, and quilling! She has taken an obstinate notion into her head that all these things are to be made by herself alone, and she won't ever let me help her. Perhaps it is as well, for if I began, I know I should only stitch sad thoughts into them, and Maud would not like that. Often and often as I sit in the dining room window with my painting, I watch her at her low seat within the curtain, working away so quietly, so rapidly. Sometimes our eyes meet, and hers are full of tell tale happiness. Dear little Maud! May it all

come true—every thought, every hope, every longing — all come true.

Not always working for herself though. I have caught her, sometimes, shyly cobbling up a huge driving glove, a world too vast for her little fairy fingers, or hemming away at a gigantic silk pocket-handkerchief, that never did and never will belong to papa. Oh ! Maud, how pleasant it must be to do anything for those we care for, to put our best, neatest, daintiest work where we know that every stitch will be prized for the sake of the hand that did it !

Too pleasant for me ever to know. Well, never mind, perhaps it is better so.

I am learning to think, that after one's drawing-room has been despoiled and emptied of its treasures—pictures, vases, statues, pleasant things all cleared away and destroyed—it is possible to live respectably and usefully, and even to a certain limited extent comfortably, in the back parlour, where at night one may draw the blinds down, and fold the curtains over the darkened prospect, and make up a cheerful fire whereby to read over the pages of long ago

memories. Only, passing the door of that *other* room sometimes, on dull dreary days, and looking over its bare unfurnished walls and shut windows, there comes a feeling of infinite sadness which we cannot drive away. Will that drawing-room of mine ever be furnished again, I wonder ?

I walked down to Marbook, and had tea with Miss Nunly last night. Her sister is going to be married in two or three weeks to a widower with six children. The bride elect was out paying some farewell visits, so Miss Nunly and I had a long quiet chat in that nice little back parlour of hers, looking down the avenue of elm trees to the Mar river. We had long speech of things to come ; namely, what she should do when Miss Keziah gets married, and what would become of me when Maud quits the parental nest to establish one of her own. I proposed, jokingly, that we should take that quaint old grey stone house in the Abbey Close, at the east end, just by the tithe barn, and live together there in a snug respectable way all the rest of our days. I can trifle sometimes myself, with those I respect



very much, about being an old maid; but if anyone else mentions it, it sends a sharp, quick bitterness through me. I suppose it will always be so.

We really laid out quite a pleasant plan for the future, and talked about it as if it might all come true. Then after a while the conversation thinned away, as it often does between me and Miss Nunly; and little by little we let it drop, and sat quite still, just watching the mist rise from the river and the blue shadows creep up upon the Downshire hills. I was not in the mood for thinking, so while she went on knitting some stockings for her sister, I set to work upon a crinoline fire-paper (what a bull) for the same lady, and employed myself, meantime, in concocting a most sublime piece of poetry touching our future life. When I got home again, I wrote it down, for there was a comfortable easy-going sort of rhyme about it, which seemed to please me.

Must this past of mine always be coming back upon me? May I never by any merciful chance

lay it away and be free of it? It seems not. Just as I was depositing this poetical effusion in my desk, I chanced to lift up what I thought was a blank envelope, lying on the top of a packet of letters. Opening it, I found that crimson mountain-ash leaf, which Philip Lowe gathered for me the Sunday afternoon we went to Lingold lake together.

Poor little leaf! poor little hard, dry, shrivelling leaf! how full of thoughts it was. How every unconscious crimson streak upon it seemed to hold a sort of reproach! And side by side with it, in the same envelope, that bright green, palmy leaf of seaweed — the leaf that I gathered on the rocks at Scarbro' when he was with me. I have them both lying before me now, as I sit at this window writing, and I can't help looking at them again and again, though I know it is not a good thing for me to do. Ah! how many things I have done that have not been good for me to do! And what pictures came thronging round them, of those restless, plashing blue waves, with white foam flickering upon them, and long

reaches of green, brown, and olive-coloured seaweed, drifting to and fro in the rock pools; and the broad sunlit line of cliffs, sweeping away into the distance. Pictures too of the lake, and the evening sky, and the russet woods, and the red leaves drifting down slowly, sleepily, along the current at our feet. And with these, thoughts of all that I might have been, all that I might have done — thoughts of something that might have been my pride and glory all through life, of a strong, true, steadfast love, which if only —

Halt there, Mabel Harcourt, no more nonsense, if you please. Remember, you and sentiment have parted company this six months and more, so don't renew the engagement. Better tear up this last page, and make it into fire-lighters, or send it up the kitchen chimney, if not in thoughts that breathe, at least in words that burn. And then put your relics back again, having first folded them up neatly and respectably, and wiped off that foolish tear from the back of the envelope. You, a steady, upgrown woman, verging on seven and twenty — yes, it's the truth, don't go sulky

about it — verging on seven and twenty, just crossing the line of sober, substantial old maidenhood, and plucking out morning by morning a portion of grey hairs to mark the place in your text-book — you maundering in this way, like a demented schoolgirl, for a person who, perhaps, never cared a straw for you, and who just now, as likely as not, is sauntering up and down his rectory garden with a bonnie young wife, ten times more winsome and amiable than ever you could be — out upon such milk and watery nonsense! Shut up the book at once, and have done with it. Be off down stairs to talk science with your papa, or help your mamma to entertain callers in the drawing-room; or tie on a brown Holland apron, and go through a campaign of domestic duties — anything, rather than sit up here, staring at the blue sky and writing this drivelling nonsense. Don't you feel ashamed of yourself? if not, you ought to be, and there is an end of it. Much study is a weariness of the flesh, and much remembering comes to about the same thing.

Yes, I will give over thinking about it. I will be very strong. I will be very cheerful. I will take all that is left for me as I find it, and work it out as best I can.

And yet—and yet—Oh, Philip, Philip !

## CHAPTER XIII.

STEPHEN RODEN had just one more journey to take for the Duke of Chartermayne ere he resigned the agency and settled down into quiet married life in the old Manor House at Glinton. That uneasy scion of the aristocracy, for ever intent on making fresh additions to his store of worldly goods, and not satisfied with already possessing estates in half the counties of England, had been purchasing a tract of land in the Highlands, whereon he contemplated building a lodge for the shooting season. And it was to superintend the measuring and felling of the timber on this estate that Mr. Roden was to make his last professional expedition.

The first north train from Marbrook started very early in the morning, and so, almost before

the sun rose, or even the birds had shaken out their feathers, or tuned the first notes of their merry song, he had left Mossingay Cottage with his valise, and was travelling along the road through Braeton Plantation.

When he came to the low gate under the elm tree, leading out upon the high road and Braeton Church, he stopped. He always did when he passed that place, the place where Maud and he gave themselves to each other. There was no sunlight sparkling now upon the old church windows, or flickering in and out, bright and quick, among the shining birch-tree leaves, or lying in golden bands upon the moss and fern, glinting over the rugged stems of the trees. There was no gushing bird song trilling up through the long leafy aisles, no breeze to ruffle the half closed flowers which hung poised and motionless upon their tiny stalks. All was utterly quiet, with the quiet of pure morning twilight, as Stephen stood at the entrance of the wood looking out upon the Braeton road.

That old gate with its grey lichened posts and mossed bars, and the elm-tree stretching over

it, was a very sacred spot to Stephen Roden. He would never pass it except alone or with Maud, that no other voice or companionship might break the spell of that first holy meeting-time. Standing beside it now, he took off his highland cap, and bending his head reverently, prayed his last prayer for Maud—the prayer he had prayed for her daily and nightly long before she had known of his love—that God would grant her a quiet life; that loving and beloved, they might walk heart to heart through all that remained of this life, and hereafter stand together in that other life where there is no more parting and no more grief—which prayer was indeed answered for them both.

And then he left the plantation and came out into the high road, with the thought of his little Maud still lying pure and precious in his heart. Next time he took that long journey into Scotland she would be with him, it was to be their wedding tour. How pleasant it would be to take her and show her all the grand scenes, the little innocent untravelled thing, who had never seen anything finer in all her life than the pretty slopes of the



Downshire hills, or the plaything cascade that trickled down Lingold watercourse. How her eyes would kindle at sight of Corra Linn and Ben Lomond, or the Trosachs' brave splendour. And then he would take her to his early home, the quaint little village of Kilcragie, and they would stand together by his mother's grave—his mother that she had so often asked him about—and he would show her the very house and the window looking out over the kirkyard, where she used to read to him. And then, for he wanted Maud to know all about his early life, that in after years they might talk of it together, she should go with him to the old farmstead of Dunlaggan, the old pine girt farmstead by the rugged mountain pass and heathery moors where he used to wander when he was a boy. How pleasant it would be for her thus to know all about him—all about him! Ah! what an innocent, honest heart it was, albeit lying within a rough and stalwart form, that after the toil and travel stain of life could thus wish its best beloved to know *all* about it; that had no painfully kept memory, no closed, dark-curtained chamber, into which

the child Maud might not nestle. Happy Maud to have won such a heart; happier Stephen to have kept it pure and fresh for her through all his eight and thirty years of struggling, working life.

Thus, thinking of the future, and sauntering slowly on, for it was a full hour yet before the train started, Stephen Roden came past Braeton Lodge; and there, where he had thought only to find drawn blinds and closed shutters and bolted doors, he spied Maud herself in her bonnie morning dress and brown straw hat, standing within the porch waiting for him; half shy, half expectant, but too innocently glad to give him other than his rightful greeting as he drew her close to him, and they passed down the long beech-tree walk together.

“So early, my little bird!” he said; “why, the skylarks have hardly opened their eyes yet, and here you are as fresh as a dewdrop. What good angel came and whispered in your ear how much I wanted to see you just once more, before I went away, if it was only for a single moment.”

“No angel at all, but an eerie dream I had

about you last night, and I came to make quite sure that it wasn't true."

"So you do dream about me sometimes, little one?" said Stephen, drawing her to him again, for she had slipped away from the close shelter of his arm, "I wondered if you did. But, Maud, you need never vex yourself about dreams that come before twelve o'clock. You know the old saying in my country:—

"The dream of the night you've no reason to rue,  
It's the dream of the morning that's sure to come true."

But tell me what it was, and all about it."

"No, no," said Maud, a strange troubled expression flickering over her quiet face, but passing quickly away, as she felt rather than saw him close by her, and knew that no wrong could come when he was so near; "it is all past and gone, and I won't say anything more about it. I want to know now, Mr. Roden, how long you're going to stay, and just what time you will get to the end of your journey, that I may think about you at the right place."

" 'Mr. Roden' will be absent exactly two days

and eleven hours," said he, in as stately a tone as the rough, honest voice could take; "but 'Stephen' is never away from his little Maud, never at all. When shall I teach you, little mischief, to call me by my own name? And yet, Maud," and his voice changed to deep, deep earnestness, "I would never leave you again if I could help it; I would stay with you always, God knows I would, Maud."

Just then the whistle of the railway train came cutting up through the still morning air.

"No, Maud," he said, as she held out her hand to say good-bye to him; "it's not my train; there's nearly half an hour yet before I need set off to Marbrook;" but he took the hand nevertheless, and held it tight and fast.

So they two stood there, still lingering in the beech-tree walk, that early June morning. The old grey towers of the abbey church rose very clearly in the distance. Already the young sunlight streaked the eastern wolds and uplands. Lingold wood shook out its long tresses of greenerie, as though weary of waiting for the first golden flush of morning upon them; and shadows

that had lain there still and brooding all through the night, crept lower and lower down the fringed slopes of Braeton plantation, revealing its many-tinted masses of foliage and broad sweeps of purple heather. But no tread of busy footsteps echoed along the Marbrook road; there was no clangour yet of daily working life, no sound to break the stillness of the early dawn, except their two voices as they talked together of the happy future which lay before them, parted only by those two days of absence which should so soon, so very soon, be past.

Neither of them belonged to that class of excitable, upper-crust sort of people, who can rush into tears at a moment's warning, or extemporise a fit of hysterics for the better signalisation of the parting scene. Their leave-taking was quiet, therefore, and calm and undemonstrative; very cheerful too, as all partings ought to be for those who have learnt the blessed, heaven-sent truth, that no time or distance, no miscalled chance or accident, no sorrow or misfortune, can sever those whose love is sealed with God's benediction, and brightened by God's smile. Besides, it was

such a little while, such a very little while, only two days, just time enough for him to run up into Scotland and attend to the Duke's business, and then he would return to prepare her lifelong home for his little Maud. After that they should be so happy, so quietly happy. No pride or display, no fashionable folly or useless show; but just a calm, even, unruffled, kindly life. How pleasant it was to look forward to!—and only parted from them by those two short days.

Very slowly and gently, as though loth to break the stillness of that young June morning, the chimes of the abbey church at Marbrook rang half-past four. Only another half-hour, and the north train would be whirling him away on his lonely journey. How he longed, more, much more, than he had ever done before, to stay and not leave her at all! Could not the clerk be sent, for this once, to make the needful arrangements in Scotland, and so let him stay with her whom it was so hard to leave? But then again it was the last journey he would have to take, and there was a sort of pride in fulfilling his duties perfectly up to the very last. No, he would go.

Still he lingered. It was so restful to be side by side with her, his little Maud, the quiet little girl who had so long ago crept into his heart, and been his joy and pride ever since,—Maud, who had never loved any one but him, who had never cared for any other smile but his, who had never hidden far away down in her innocent thought any other name but his name. Those quiet grey eyes raised to his now, had caught the look they found there from none other before; the little fingers which he held in his great strong hand had lain in no clasp but his. She was his only, his for ever; with no memory of any stronger love behind her, with no haunting remembrance to lie between her and him to whom she belonged, with no old half-forgotten voice to make contrast to the tenderness of his. They stood there, hand in hand, heart to heart, as those should always stand who are to tread life's journey together, until, that journey ended, they lie down side by side, waiting, unparted even in death, the angel's voice which shall call them home, and lead them, still hand in hand, and heart to heart, forth to behold the King in His beauty, to stand for ever before

the presence of His glory, in the land that is very far off.

“Only two days, Maud. Look,” he said, drawing down a branch of the climbing rose which overhung the porch, “at this little young bud, trying to burst its rosy flower through the thick green leaves. Before it has come into blossom I shall be back to you again. It is only a little while;” and as if longing to make it shorter still, he said again, and yet again,—

“Only a little while, Maud.”

He loosened his hold of the branch, and it swung back again into the air, heaving to and fro with the impulse he had given it. Maud watched until it had gradually rocked itself to rest, and hung poised in perfect stillness, each bud and branching stem, each leaf and blossom, clearly defined upon the brightening sky. Often and often she came to look at it again that day. Often and often, in far other days, she came to look at it, when there was no Stephen to reach it down for her any more.

One long, quiet caress, and he had left her, standing there in the porch, and listening to the



tread of his footsteps' on the gravel walk. One moment more and he would be gone. A sudden impulse came over her ; she knew not why she did it, but, quick as thought, she sprang down the steps and away to the gate.

“ Stephen ! ”

It was the first time she had ever called him by his name. He turned and opened his arms for her. She crept very closely up to him, so close that she could feel his heart beating against hers, and his warm breath coming down upon her cheek ; but neither of them spoke any word. Then she unloosed the hands that clasped her round, and let him go from her.

She stood by the gate, listening to the ring of his steps on the quiet Marbrook road, firm, and strong, and elastic. The church bells chimed a quarter to five, but when the sound had died away, she heard that regular tramp again, coming clear and even through the still air. Then it grew fainter and fainter, until almost the sighing of the wind through the orchard boughs was enough to cover it ; and then, even as she stood listening, it faded quite away.

After that, Maud paced up and down the beech-tree walk, thinking it all over again. Every time she reached the top of the walk and turned, Prince, the great Newfoundland dog, came out of his kennel, and thrust his brown head into her hand, looking up wistfully into her face out of his great earnest eyes. Then he went back again, trailing his chain with a clanking sound after him, and waited for the next turn. By and by the abbey clock struck five. Then the railway whistle, clear, and sharp, and ringing, cut its way up the valley, followed by the heavy rumbling of the carriages over the Marbrook viaduct. It was the train that was taking Stephen away. On it went, rattling over the arches, rumbling through the high banks of the cutting, then off and away into the open country, the sound of the whistle lying all the while sharp and intense upon the air, until at last both sounds died away together, and all was still again, just as it was when Maud first came into the porch, save that the sunlight had poured out brave and strong on the Lingold wood, and the long shadows on Braeton plantation had crept

quite down and hidden themselves in the valley beneath.

Stephen did not go along the high road all the way to Marbrook, but turned off about a quarter of a mile from where he left Maud, and walked the rest of the distance through the wood, where every leaf and branch and flower was gleaming and glistening now in June sunshine. Very softly and tenderly the long level bars of golden light lay upon the sweeping masses of young green foliage; very brightly they wound round the shining birch-tree stems, and upon the thick carpet of bright primula leaves which lay beneath. Very freshly, too, the wind came sweeping up those long aisles, bowing the heads of the flowers as it passed, and making the hoary old trees, that had been silent all night, talk friendly to each other with their thousand whispering voices.

Going through that wood on his way to the north train, Stephen Roden saw a very beautiful picture.

It was a great, tall, palm-like cluster of bracken growing midway up the mossy bank on his right

hand. Golden threads of sunlight laced and interlaced its thousand leaflets, and shot through and through the dewdrops that hung from its drooping stems. One bright green frond turned away from the rest, and curled round, over-arching a mossy nook in the bank, in which one single harebell had just opened its pale blue flower, not drooping wearily on its stalk, as when faint with the heat of noonday, but half raised, looking out fresh and expectant to the coming sun. No other blossom sprang within that fern-leaf shade; the little harebell was princess of the green solitude: nothing near it but fresh sparkling moss, and one plume of feathery grass, whose tender golden hue, and constant flickering motion, made the harebell seem more quiet and restful. And over the entrance of this little fairy bower the dew-drops hung, and into it the sunlight shone, and round it the wind blew softly and musically.

This was the picture that Stephen Roden saw; that he kneeled down at last to ponder over. It reminded him of Maud — Maud just looking out for the sunshine that was so near — Maud

fresh and expectant, yet so gentle, so retiring, so guarded, so sheltered, so watched over—Maud the queen, the only one. He looked at it for long, and then went on his way. But he came back again to see it once more. It seemed to look at him, did that little harebell, and speak to him so strangely of Maud.

He could not leave it there; he gathered it and laid it reverently away in the little Testament he always carried, until that other flower of which to him it was the type, should be gathered too.

Maud walked up and down the garden many times. At last Prince got tired of coming out to pay his respects to her, and contented himself with a congratulating wag of his tail inside the kennel. Then, with one more glance at Stephen's rosebud over the porch, she went into the drawing-room and lay down on the sofa to finish her night's rest. Murmuring to herself, "Only two days, a little while," she dropped off to sleep, dreaming on still of him, and the pleasant future which lay beyond that tiny stream of time.

Time, that parts so quickly and surely those who once were joined,—time, that beneath those

innocent-sounding drops of hours and moments works such mighty issues of separation,—time, that sweeps away the filmy haze of hope, and leaves it tangled, torn and grey on the dusty road of life,—it was such time as this that lay between Maud and her future.

O merciful wisdom, which hides from our mortal sight those angels of sorrow and death walking so near us, which suffers us to part from our friends, saying, “It is but for a little while, the meeting time will soon come again; this hand shall clasp yours, these eyes behold you, these voices welcome you back,”—so calming, so comforting our longing affection, so raying over the future with joys from the past, while He, the great God, all wise, all powerful, all loving, knows that none of these things will ever be !

Better so; better so.

For it let Maud sleep quietly, innocently on, while the golden sunlight came up brighter and brighter over Braeton village and the Lingold wood, and warm midsummer air sent bird and bee carolling over the heathery moors, and a world of life, that had lain coiled up through the

twilight, began to wake and 'labour and enjoy again. And the wheels of toil moved round, and the great north train that was taking Stephen Roden away rattled noisily along over brae and valley and moorland, through tunnel and cutting, past wood and lea and meadow, until it came to the steep embankment at Barwick-law, a hundred miles away from Marbrook.

And there it stopped.

## CHAPTER XIV.

WHEN Maud awoke again, it was broad, full daylight; busy working time. Household sounds were going on all round her; she could hear Manley and Joan chattering over their kitchen work; her papa sat at his desk in the little study casement, with books and papers all around him; the old gardener in his shirt-sleeves was mowing the lawn near by the orchard hedge, from time to time picking up a stray cherry, and throwing it to his little three-year-old daughter, who was squatted under a barberry bush, keeping guard over her father's fustian jacket. And Mabel sat in her favourite nook by the old beech tree, with a book lying in her lap — not reading though, but turning her pale dreamy face away towards the sunlit Lingold wood.



People said Mabel had changed very much lately. She had quite lost her proud, haughty ways, and there seemed to have come over her a strange, quiet, chastened temper. She was more dependent, too, on her sister for rest and comfort than ever she had been before, more gentle and easy to be entreated. How it was, no one could tell, not even Maud herself. All she knew about it was that their house had more of love in it now from Mabel, and therefore more of happiness. None of them remembered—perhaps very few of us do—how often gentleness grows out of grief, and loving-kindness, forced back from its one great broad channel, seeks its way to other courses uncared for before.

When Maud's household duties were over, she and Mabel went down the village to see Lizzie Machin and read her morning chapter, for the old woman wearied now if one or other of them did not visit her every day. Coming out of the cottage-door, they encountered Miss Gabbatis trotting down the street, with her green silk umbrella doing duty as a parasol.

“Why,” said Mabel, with a touch of her old

gay-heartedness, as the active little maiden lady came down in full sail upon them, "you look as smart as a new sixpence : do tell us all about it."

For Miss Gabbatis was attired in a costume of unprecedented splendour. The customary brown alpaca had given place to one of pale drab shade, with two flounces, and a running pattern of green ; a light barège shawl, of the extensive coloury pattern which used to be worn in her young days, hung gracefully from her virgin shoulders ; and the old Dunstable bonnet, with its brown bow dropping down behind, was exchanged for a fancy straw with a green riband and white cap. Moreover, she had on a pair of clean white silk gloves, a reach of extravagance unmatched in all the annals of her past history ; for Miss Gabbatis had hitherto confined herself to the wearing of eighteenpenny kid, tastefully ventilated at the finger ends, and destitute of such useless appendages as buttons or clasps.

"Smart, indeed !" said the merry little spinster, with a modestly triumphant glance at her toilette. "I should rather like to know when people ought to be smart, if it isn't when they go

about paying bride visits, especially a bride in whom I may venture to say I feel an almost motherly interest, having brought her up ever since she was a child, and taught her to clean brasses so that you can't tell them from new; to say nothing of instructing her in practical objects, and hearing her read the Psalms every morning of her life."

"Why, Miss Gabbatis, you don't mean to say that your little maid Sally has gone and got married?" said Maud, plucking the leaves from a long straggling wild rose that hung over the hedge, and watching them drift away in the sunshine.

"Oh, but I do though; and very pretty she looked, in a white print, spotted with pale pink, that I made up for her out of one of my dear mother's—cost four and sixpence a yard when it was new—you know, poor thing, she's got no one but me to look after her and make her look nice—and a pretty little straw bonnet trimmed with white, and a sprigged muslin cape, and a collar that I cut out by a shape my godmother sent me ten years ago, when I was having my last

new ones made; rather large, perhaps, as fashions go now, but you see, Sally has good stout shoulders of her own, and needs a tolerable-sized collar; and then — but if you'll just go home with me and rest yourselves in the back parlour, I'll tell you about it."

So they all three went. When Miss Gabbatis had anything to say, she always said it in a regular, straightforward, unbroken current, waiting neither for note nor comment, until she had come to the end of her story. So, when the aforementioned back parlour was reached, and the two visitors deposited, one on each side of the window, looking out over the little turnip patch in the garden; and when Miss Gabbatis had given the kittens some fresh milk, and set the potatoes on to boil in the kitchen, she commenced her recital in due form.

"Well, you must know, it's been going on for the last six months. If my memory serves me right, it couldn't be much more than ten days after Christmas that I began all of a sudden to get such remarkably fine celery, and such very mealy potatoes, when everybody else, even

Mrs. Herman Kaye herself, was complaining about inferior vegetables. But I did not mention it to anybody, as I thought it might excite envy and make me unpopular. By and by I began to notice that on Wednesdays and Saturdays — you know my gardener's man always comes on those days — Sally used to pomatum her hair, and put on her best afternoon cap with blue ribands, and a clean collar and apron; and I used to notice, too, that they were always an immense long time counting out the change, and that he got to be very forgetful, and as often as not used to have to come round in an evening, when Sally's work was done, to bring things that ought to have come before. So that we had his cart stopping at the gate as many as five or six times a week, and I really began to be afraid the neighbours would think I did nothing else but eat celery and potatoes and fancy vegetables, which would have been a great mistake, for I'm sure I'm not given to indulge myself in anything of the sort.

“Well, you see, never having been entangled in a love affair of my own, I wasn't perhaps quite so sharp as I might have been; but after we had

been going on in this way for about two months, I couldn't help beginning to suspect which way the wind blew. So one morning, after I had seen the meat into the oven, and the potatoes into the pot—such splendid mealy ones!—and set Sally to clean out the back yard, for we had just had the coalmen in, away I trotted off down the village to the head-gardener at Braeton Park, to hear what sort of a customer this young Roger was; not, of course, giving the slightest hint that there was anything of a leaning—at least, you understand, a personal feeling—on Sally's part, for I can't endure match-making—it's broken far more hearts than it's ever brought together—but just to get a little insight, you know; and he gave me a most satisfactory account of the young man,—never stopped out of nights, was a good lad to his mother, belonged to the Temperance Society, had a trifle in the Marbrook bank, went to church regularly—in short, such a character that I came home with quite a load off my mind.

“Well, after that—but, dear me, my potatoes are boiling over, I hear; you must just excuse me whilst I go and look after them;—after that, I

began to wish they would bring the affair to a crisis, for I was afraid it was preying on the poor young man's nerves. He gave over whistling 'Red, White, and Blue,' when he brought the potatoes, and took to singing 'Ever of thee,' in a lamentable key; and as for Sally, she got into the way of making the most unaccountable mistakes you can imagine — cutting the bread-loaves wrong end up, putting pepper into the pudding sauce, giving my kittens linseed tea instead of milk, writing 'My dear Roger' in her copy-books, instead of the moral sentiments I used to set her; going into fits of low spirits, and wiping her eyes with her apron-corner when she came in of an evening to have her practical lessons; so that really, if things had gone on much longer, I should have been obliged to take the matter into my own hands, and make Sally an offer on the part of Roger. But he saved me the trouble by doing it himself.

"If my memory serves me right, it was about three months ago, just when young rhubarb began to come in. I was sitting in the front parlour making up my weekly accounts—I always add

up my accounts on a Saturday night—and I'd got into a fix, for I balanced them twopence-halfpenny wrong, and couldn't get it right anyhow, try as I would. I had just settled it in my own mind that I must have paid too much for the bacon I got the market day before, or else that Roger had given me wrong change when he brought the last bundle of rhubarb, when Sally came in, twisting her apron strings and dropping a great many curtseys. I always teach her to make a curtsey when she comes into the front parlour, but I'm not so particular when I'm living in the back.

“‘Pleas'm,’ she began, looking very red; but that was no wonder, for she has a coloury complexion at all times, and she'd just been scouring out the back kitchen ready for Sunday.

“‘Oh!’ I said, ‘it's the butcher boy, is it, Sally, brought the calf's heart? Very well; hang it up in the pantry, and mind and let it be well stuffed, and make a good gravy for it.’

“‘Pleas'm, it isn't the boy with the calf's heart; it's him as——’

“‘Oh! the whitewasher, is it, Sally?’—for you see, Miss Mabel, a great piece of colouring had



shelled off the scullery ceiling, and I wanted it set straight before Sunday, and I expected the man every minute. ‘All right, Sally,’ I said; ‘you must get him the steps, and ask him to be so kind as not to make any more splashes than he can help.’

“‘Pleas’m, it isn’t him neither,’ and Sally’s face went redder than ever, and she pulled her apron strings all manners of ways, and looked down the garden to where the vegetable cart was standing at the gate with nobody to take care of it.

“‘Oh! it’s the gardener, is it?’ I said—‘come to set that twopence-halfpenny right; very well, Sally, and you may tell him to bring us a head of lettuce and two quarts of gooseberries.’

“‘Oh! pleas’m, he hasn’t brought aught at all, he’s nobbut axed me,’—and here Sally flung her apron string away, and made a desperate dash down the passage into the back kitchen; and when I went after her, she was standing with her frock over her head, crying behind the copper.”

“How very romantic!” said Mabel, who was studying the turnip patch before the window, with a look on her face which neither Maud nor Miss Gabbatis could exactly make out.

“Well, poor girl,” replied the kind-hearted little maiden lady; “I dare say she felt it just as much as if she had been shedding them on the bosom of a six-foot officer, or crying them into a French cambric handkerchief with an embroidered edge and a crest in the corner. However, that sort of thing wouldn’t do for me, so I brought her back again into the front parlour, and sat her down on a chair, and began to put the whole affair into shipshape.

“‘Well, Sally, Roger Coates has been asking you to marry him, I suppose.’

“‘Yes’m, pleas’m, that’s just it; only it seemed like as if I couldn’t get you told, somehow,’ said poor Sally, going off into tears again.

“‘And you love him, Sally, do you?’

“‘Love him! oh yes, ma’am, nice young man, bless him,’ and Sally brightened up.

“‘Well,’ I said, ‘I’ve no objection to the match, as I hear he is steady, and good to his mother, and belongs to the Temperance Society, and attends church regularly; so you have my best wishes, Sally, and I hope you’ll be very happy with him, for they say a good son makes a good

husband ;' and here, seeing that she was on the point of being overpowered by her feelings again, I packed her off back into the kitchen, and sat down to think about it ; for you know it seemed rather strange to have the prospect of a wedding in the house, and me a lone maiden lady who don't have so much as a hat hanging up in my passage from January to June."

"And was that only three months ago?" said Maud ; "and they are married and settled now."

"Only three months, my dear. I always said, if ever I married, I'd have it cleared out of the way, courtship and wedding and all, in six months at the farthest ; it keeps one in such a perpetual flurry, and it isn't always convenient to have people coming and going about the house. But I took care to give them plenty of opportunities of getting acquainted with each other, for you know it's one of my whims that the happiness of a kitchen-maid is of as much importance as that of a countess ; and if I had a daughter I shouldn't like her to learn the character of her future husband by gossiping with him at back doors and lane ends, and stealing surreptitious

interludes of tenderness in areas and passages when Missis's back is turned. So next time the gardener's cart came to my gate,—and it came pretty soon, I can assure you,—I had him up into the kitchen, and made things straight too.”

“ ‘Well, Roger,’ I said, ‘I suppose you and my Sally are thinking of getting married.’

“ ‘Why, yes, and please you, Ma’am,’ he said, turning up one of his boot soles, and counting the nails in it; while Sally stood in the far corner, with her apron ready to throw over her head if needful. ‘We’ve been considering this good bit past as how we’d like to be wed, if so be yourself hadn’t any objection. I’ve saved up plenty to saddle her wi’ a comfortable home, and we’re both on us thinking time’s come to mak’ a start together.’

“Here Sally’s apron began to move in an upward direction, and she made various grunts and ejaculations expressive of a modest acquiescence in her admirer’s opinions. So I said, ‘Well, Roger, I’ve nothing to say against it. Sally’s always been a very good servant, and I’ve no doubt but that she’ll make you a good wife

too; and as I think it prudent for young people to know each other well before taking such an important step, I shall be glad for you to come and have your tea every Sunday afternoon after service is over, and then go to church with Sally in the evening; and if you've a mind to take her out for a walk now and then when your day's work is over, I shall make no objections, only you get back punctually at half-past eight.'

"When I had got this said, Roger turned as red as a stalk of Turkey rhubarb, and made me a low bow, being too much affected for any other expression of his feelings; and Sally threw her apron over her head, and made a start for the back kitchen, to have a second cry behind the copper, I suppose, for she's a girl of very demonstrative disposition, and doesn't restrain her feelings much in a general way. So from that time until the wedding-day, which took place last Tuesday, I used to have them billing and cooing together in my kitchen."

"It was very kind of you, Miss Gabbatis, I'm sure; there are not many people, especially

maiden ladies, who would have taken so much trouble."

"Oh, depend upon it, Miss Maud, no one ever loses anything by being kind to people who love one another — not, of course, that I had any personal views in the matter, not at all—but you would have been surprised after that, indeed you would, to see how well I got attended to. Why, Sally thought she had never done enough for me, and waited on me hand and foot just as if I had been made of gold and pearls; and as for poor Roger, one might have thought I had nothing to do but eat such lots of choice things as he brought to the house by way of showing his gratitude. No one in this parish got such gooseberries as I did, I reckon, during the eleven weeks which intervened between the engagement and the wedding; and as for green peas and asparagus, the Duke of Chartermayne himself might have envied me; to say nothing of bouquets of flowers three times a week, and a fresh cut cucumber every Saturday night, for my cold dinner on Sunday, you know, and cabbage-

leaves of strawberries that couldn't be matched out of Covent Garden. Oh, but I lived in clover those eleven weeks, you may depend."

"It must have been very interesting to watch the progress of affairs," said Maud.

"Why, yes, I can't say but what it was; not that I understood much about it. I didn't exactly see what enjoyment so very much there could be in sitting, one at the bottom end of the kitchen table, and the other on the coal-bunk in front of the cupboard door, just as they always used to do when I happened to see them; but perhaps they mightn't be particular about changing their position a little, now and then, when they felt drawn rather closer to each other. And then, you know, sometimes when I heard them talking away in the kitchen, and I sat here all alone, I couldn't help feeling that it would have been rather pleasanter if I had had some one to love me too and cheer me up a bit;" and Miss Gabbatis made a gulp as if she were swallowing something down, and Mabel looked hard and fast at the white clouds sweeping over the Marbrook hills.

“Well, you’re getting up to go, are you? and it must be time I was looking after my potatoes. You see, I haven’t got a new maid since Sally got married, and when one’s left to oneself, one’s obliged to put one’s hand to anything that turns up, even though one has been brought up genteelly, and has connections in the church. But I always say, my dears, Do the duty that lies nearest you, whether it be peeling potatoes or preaching sermons; so I’ll wish you a good morning for the present; and mind you come, both of you, and see me again before long.”

Maud and Mabel walked home almost in silence to the garden gate, and then, leaving her sister to go to their papa in his study, Maud turned off into Lingold wood, down that long glade leading across to the brook, on the other side of which lay Glinton Manor.

Very bonnie it looked in the perfect hush and stillness of that summer noon time, its twisted chimneys and grey-mossed gables rising into the warm quivering air; the sunlight flickering in and out among the ivy leaves that wrapped so closely



round the oriel window; the cool, soft shadows lying within the carved work of the old doorway; the terrace with its stone vases, and quaintly-moulded balustrades, that led out from the entrance to the brook side; the old arched gate opening to the wood beyond, the thick, green Glington wood, carpeted now with wild hyacinths and white windflower. And then the fountain pond, with tall flag leaves and water-lilies floating double, leaf and shadow, upon its still, dreamy waters; and forget-me-nots meekly opening their blue eyes in the sunshine. And beyond that the smooth velvet lawn, sloping upward to the old seat under the elm-tree, and stretching along past the great cypress, put there in Elizabeth's time, which cast its cool, dark shadow athwart the sunlit wood behind. There were flowers, the good old English flowers that Stephen was so fond of, glancing and smiling everywhere, —sweet-williams, pinks, wall-flowers; pure white Canterbury bells nodding lazily in the warm air; pansies, purple, black, and blue; sweet-briar loading the place with pleasant country smell;

great bushes of rose and honeysuckle clambering over the low hedges. And for green to tone down the rich masses of colour, tall old holly-bushes, and gigantic Portugal laurels, that had been growing there for generations past, and evergreen barberries with their bright shining leaves and berries; great rich plummy brackens, growing out from the terrace walk, with clusters of dark briony leaves wreathing round and round them; and fairy-like mosses creeping in and out among the flower-beds, and over the carved stone vases, and over the grey balustrades, covering them with delicate pencilled fretwork. And for sound, the rooks cawing in Glinton wood, and the brook tripping and trickling with changeful voice over the loose gravel; and the water-drops falling with slow measured plash from the fountain, hardly stirring the lily leaves that floated beneath.

Maud's home that was to be!

She stood there looking at it for long. Thinking, perhaps, as she looked, of times gone by, years and years ago, when that great black cypress-

tree stretching its brawny arms across the wood was a tender young sapling that a child's hand might have bent ; or when the old lichen-covered vases, standing along the terrace walk, shone in white marble freshness fit for any courtly dame's fair hand to rest upon as she stooped over the scented flowers they held. Thinking, perhaps, of days younger than those, but very far back still, when some gentle Puritan maiden, with her Roundhead lover, had paced up and down that same terrace walk, and doughty warriors had stood within those oriel windows, telling strange stories of strife and battle ; or when little children, of quaint garb and long-forgotten speech, had danced on the smooth lawn and played beside that same old fountain urn. Thinking, perhaps, of days to come, when she should stand, not alone, looking out on that fair English home ; when, with Stephen Roden by her side, she might saunter along those pleasant walks and listen to the cool plash of the waters, and watch the sun go down behind Glinton wood ; and when, with his love for comfort and his presence for

safety, her whole life should be one long, bright, peaceful psalm.

And where was Stephen Roden? and where was the future? and where any more happiness for either of them in that old manor house of Glinton, with its oriel windows and pointed gables, and its garden smiling in the June sunshine?

Poor little Maud!

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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